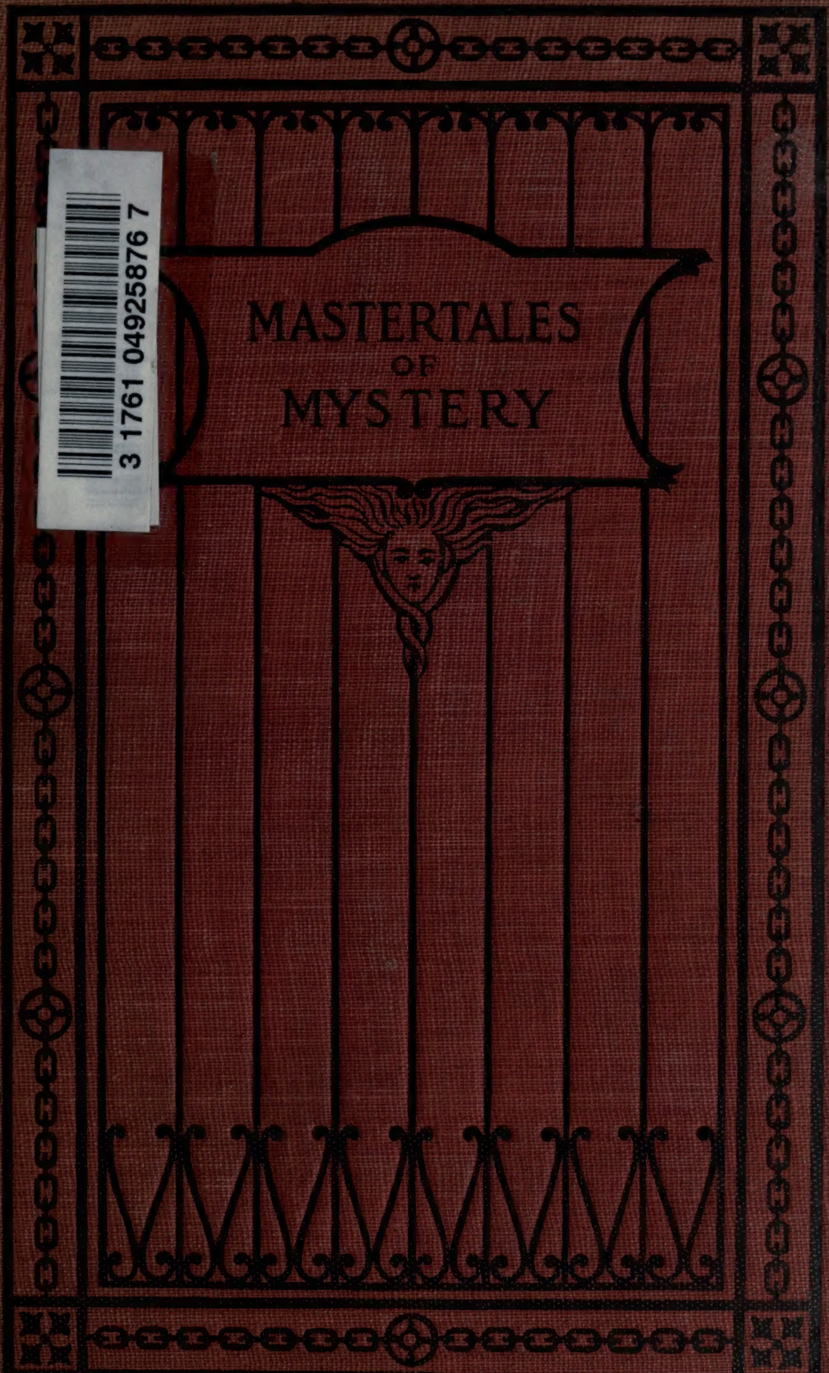

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Cheap by M.L.C. Pickthall
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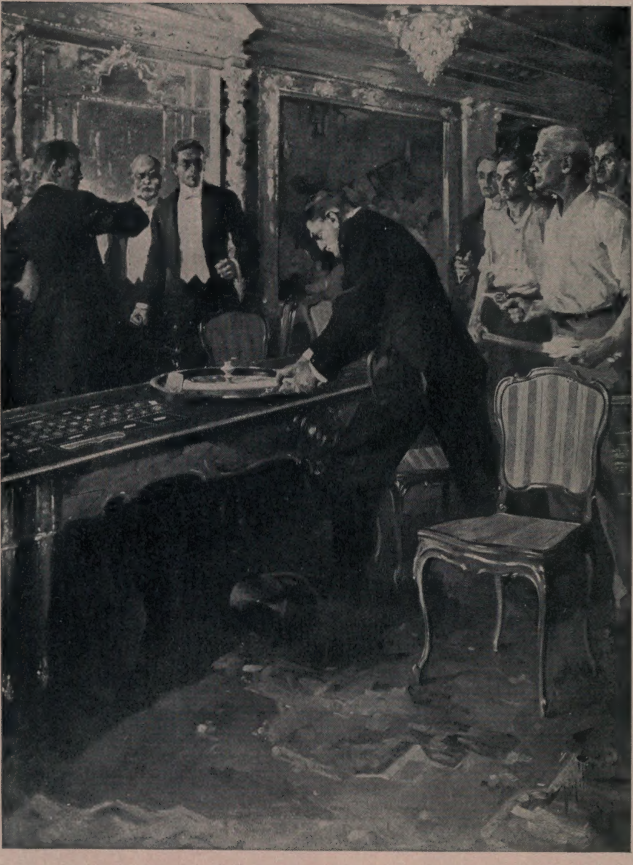

A well-directed blow shattered the mechanism of the delicate wheel

Arthur B. Reeve *The Steel Door—p. 141*

MASTER TALES of MYSTERY

BY THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS
AUTHORS OF TO-DAY

COLLECTED AND ARRANGED
BY FRANCIS J. REYNOLDS

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The Poisoned Pen

BY ARTHUR B. REEVE

The Poisoned Pen

BY ARTHUR B. REEVE

I

KENNEDY'S suit-case was lying open on the bed, and he was literally throwing things into it from his chiffonier, as I entered after a hurried trip up-town from the *Star* office in response to an urgent message from him.

"Come, Walter," he cried, hastily stuffing in a package of clean laundry without taking off the wrapping-paper, I've got your suit-case out. Pack up whatever you can in five minutes. We must take the six o'clock train for Danbridge."

I did not wait to hear any more. The mere mention of the name of the quaint and quiet little Connecticut town was sufficient. For Danbridge was on everybody's lips at that time. It was the scene of the now famous Danbridge poisoning case—a brutal case in which the pretty little actress, Vera Lytton, had been the victim.

"I've been retained by Senator Adrian Willard," he called from his room, as I was busy packing in mine. "The Willard family believe that that young Dr. Dixon is the victim of a conspiracy—or at least Alma Willard does, which comes to the same thing, and—well, the senator called me up on long-distance and offered me anything I would name in reason to take the case. Are you ready? Come on, then. We've simply got to make that train."

As we settled ourselves in the smoking-compartment of the Pullman, which for some reason or other we had to ourselves, Kennedy spoke again for the first time since our frantic dash across the city to catch the train.

"Now let us see, Walter," he began. "We've both read a good deal about this case in the papers. Let's try to get our knowledge in an orderly shape before we tackle the actual case itself."

"Ever been in Danbridge?" I asked.

"Never," he replied. "What sort of place is it?"

"Mighty interesting," I answered; "a combination of old New England and new, of ancestors and factories, of wealth and poverty, and above all it is interesting for its colony of New-Yorkers—what shall I call it?—a literary-artistic-musical combination, I guess."

"Yes," he resumed. "I thought as much. Vera Lytton belonged to the colony. A very talented girl, too—you remember her in 'The Taming of the New Woman' last season? Well, to get back to the facts as we know them at present.

"Here is a girl with a brilliant future on the stage discovered by her friend, Mrs. Boncour, in convulsions—practically insensible—with a bottle of headache-powder and a jar of ammonia on her dressing-table. Mrs. Boncour sends the maid for the nearest doctor, who happens to be a Dr. Waterworth. Meanwhile she tries to restore Miss Lytton, but with no result. She smells the ammonia and then just tastes the headache-powder, a very foolish thing to do, for by the time Dr. Waterworth arrives he has two patients."

"No," I corrected, "only one, for Miss Lytton was dead when he arrived, according to his latest statement."

"Very well, then—one. He arrives, Mrs. Boncour is ill, the maid knows nothing at all about it, and Vera Lytton is dead. He, too, smells the ammonia, tastes the headache-powder—just the merest trace—and then he has two patients, one of them himself. We must see him, for his experience must have been appalling. How he ever did it I can't imagine, but he saved both himself and Mrs. Boncour from poisoning—cyanide, the papers say, but of course we can't accept that until we see. It seems to me, Walter, that lately the papers have made the rule in murder cases: When in doubt, call it cyanide."

Not relishing Kennedy in the humor of expressing his real opinion of the newspapers, I hastily turned the conversation back again by asking, "How about the note from Dr. Dixon?"

"Ah, there is the crux of the whole case—that note from

Dixon. Let us see. Dr. Dixon is, if I am informed correctly, of a fine and aristocratic family, though not wealthy. I believe it has been established that while he was an interne in a city hospital he became acquainted with Vera Lytton, after her divorce from that artist Thurston. Then comes his removal to Danbridge and his meeting and later his engagement with Miss Willard. On the whole, Walter, judging from the newspaper pictures, Alma Willard is quite the equal of Vera Lytton for looks, only of a different style of beauty. Oh, well, we shall see. Vera decided to spend the spring and summer at Danbridge in the bungalow of her friend, Mrs. Boncour, the novelist. That's when things began to happen."

"Yes," I put it, "when you come to know Danbridge as I did after that summer when you were abroad, you'll understand, too. Everybody knows everybody else's business. It is the main occupation of a certain set, and the per-capita output of gossip is a record that would stagger the census bureau. Still, you can't get away from the note, Craig. There it is, in Dixon's own handwriting, even if he does deny it: 'This will cure your headache. Dr. Dixon.' That's a damning piece of evidence."

"Quite right," he agreed hastily; "the note was queer, though, wasn't is? They found it crumpled up in the jar of ammonia. Oh, there are lots of problems the newspapers have failed to see the significance of, let alone trying to follow up."

Our first visit in Danbridge was to the prosecuting attorney, whose office was not far from the station on the main street. Craig had wired him, and he had kindly waited to see us, for it was evident that Danbridge respected Senator Willard and every one connected with him.

"Would it be too much to ask just to see that note that was found in the Boncour bungalow?" asked Craig.

The prosecutor, an energetic young man, pulled out of a document-case a crumpled note which had been pressed flat again. On it in clear, deep black letters were the words, just as reported:

This will cure your headache.

Dr. Dixon.

"How about the handwriting?" asked Kennedy.

The lawyer pulled out a number of letters. "I'm afraid they will have to admit it," he said with reluctance, as if down in his heart he hated to prosecute Dixon. "We have lots of these, and no handwriting expert could successfully deny the identity of the writing."

He stowed away the letters without letting Kennedy get a hint as to their contents. Kennedy was examining the note carefully.

"May I count on having this note for further examination, of course always at such times and under such conditions as you agree to?"

The attorney nodded. "I am perfectly willing to do anything not illegal to accommodate the senator," he said. "But, on the other hand, I am here to do my duty for the state, cost whom it may."

The Willard house was in a virtual state of siege. Newspaper reporters from Boston and New York were actually encamped at every gate, terrible as an army, with cameras. It was with some difficulty that we got in, even though we were expected, for some of the more enterprising had already fooled the family by posing as officers of the law and messengers from Dr. Dixon.

The house was a real, old colonial mansion with tall white pillars, a door with a glittering brass knocker, which gleamed out severely at you as you approached through a hedge of faultlessly trimmed boxwoods.

Senator, or rather former Senator, Willard met us in the library, and a moment later his daughter Alma joined him. She was tall, like her father, a girl of poise and self-control. Yet even the schooling of twenty-two years in rigorous New England self-restraint could not hide the very human pallor of her face after the sleepless nights and nervous days since this trouble had broken on her placid existence. Yet there was a mark of strength and determination on her face that was fascinating. The man who would trifle with this girl, I felt, was playing fast and loose with her very life. I thought then, and I said to Kennedy afterward: "If this Dr. Dixon is guilty, you have no right to hide it from that girl. Anything less than the truth will only blacken the hideousness of the crime that has already been committed."

The senator greeted us gravely, and I could not but take it as a good omen when, in his pride of wealth and family and tradition, he laid bare everything to us, for the sake of Alma Willard. It was clear that in this family there was one word that stood above all others, "Duty."

As we were about to leave after an interview barren of new facts, a young man was announced, Mr. Halsey Post. He bowed politely to us, but it was evident why he had called, as his eye followed Alma about the room.

"The son of the late Halsey Post, of Post & Vance, silversmiths, who have the large factory in town, which you perhaps noticed," explained the senator. "My daughter has known him all her life. A very fine young man.

Later, we learned that the senator had bent every effort toward securing Halsey Post as a son-in-law, but his daughter had had views of her own on the subject.

Post waited until Alma had withdrawn before he disclosed the real object of his visit.

In almost a whisper, lest she should still be listening, he said, "There is a story about town that Vera Lytton's former husband—an artist named Thurston—was here just before her death."

Senator Willard leaned forward as if expecting to hear Dixon immediately acquitted. None of us was prepared for the next remark.

"And the story goes on to say that he threatened to make a scene over a wrong he says he has suffered from Dixon. I don't know anything more about it, and I tell you only because I think you ought to know what Danbridge is saying under its breath."

We shook off the last of the reporters who affixed themselves to us, and for a moment Kennedy dropped in at the little bungalow to see Mrs. Boncour. She was much better, though she had suffered much. She had taken only a pinhead of the poison, but it had proved very nearly fatal.

"Had Miss Lytton any enemies whom you think of, people who were jealous of her professionally or personally?" asked Craig.

"I should not even have said Dr. Dixon was an enemy," she replied evasively.

"But this Mr. Thurston," put in Kennedy quickly. "One is not usually visited in perfect friendship by a husband who has been divorced."

She regarded him keenly for a moment. "Halsey Post told you that," she said. "No one else knew he was here. But Halsey Post was an old friend of both Vera and Mr. Thurston before they separated. By chance he happened to drop in the day Mr. Thurston was here, and later in the day I gave him a letter to forward to Mr. Thurston, which had come after the artist left. I'm sure no one else knew the artist. He was there the morning of the day she died, and —and—that's every bit I'm going to tell you about him, so there. I don't know why he came or where he went."

"That's a thing we must follow up later," remarked Kennedy as we made our adieus. "Just now I want to get the facts in hand. The next thing on my programme is to see this Dr. Waterworth."

We found the doctor still in bed; in fact, a wreck as the result of his adventure. He had little to correct in the facts of the story which had been published so far. But there were many other details of the poisoning he was quite willing to discuss frankly.

"It was true about the jar of ammonia?" asked Kennedy.

"Yes," he answered. "It was standing on her dressing-table with the note crumpled up in it, just as the papers said."

"And you have no idea why it was there?"

"I didn't say that. I can guess. Fumes of ammonia are one of the antidotes for poisoning of that kind."

"But Vera Lytton could hardly have known that," objected Kennedy.

"No, of course not. But she probably did know that ammonia is good for just that sort of faintness which she must have experienced after taking the powder. Perhaps she thought of sal volatile, I don't know. But most people know that ammonia in some form is good for faintness of this sort, even if they don't know anything about cyanides and——"

"Then it was cyanide?" interrupted Craig.

"Yes," he replied slowly. It was evident that he was suffering great physical and nervous anguish as the result of his too intimate acquaintance with the poisons in question. "I will tell you precisely how is was, Professor Kennedy. When I was called in to see Miss Lytton I found her on the bed. I pried open her jaws and smelled the sweetish odor of the cyanogen gas. I knew then what she had taken, and at the moment she was dead. In the next room I heard some one moaning. The maid said that is was Mrs. Boncour, and that she was deathly sick. I ran into her room, and though she was beside herself with pain I managed to control her, though she struggled desperately against me. I was rushing her to the bathroom, passing through Miss Lytton's room. 'What's wrong?' I asked as I carried her along. 'I took some of that,' she replied, pointing to the bottle on the dressing-table.

"I put a small quantity of its crystal contents on my tongue. Then I realized the most tragic truth of my life. I had taken one of the deadliest poisons in the world. The odor of the released gas of cyanogen was strong. But more than that, the metallic taste and the horrible burning sensation told of the presence of some form of mercury, too. In that terrible moment my brain worked with the incredible swiftness of light. In a flash I knew that if I added malic acid to the mercury—perchloride of mercury or corrosive sublimate—I would have calomel or subchloride of mercury, the only thing that would switch the poison out of my system and Mrs. Boncour's.

"Seizing her about the waist, I hurried into the dining-room. On a sideboard was a dish of fruit. I took two apples. I made her eat one, core and all. I ate the other. The fruit contained the malic acid I needed to manufacture the calomel, and I made it right there in nature's own laboratory. But there was no time to stop. I had to act just as quickly to neutralize that cyanide, too. Remembering the ammonia, I rushed back with Mrs. Boncour, and we inhaled the fumes. Then I found a bottle of peroxide of hydrogen. I washed out her stomach with it, and then my own. Then I injected some of the peroxide into various parts of her body. The peroxide of hydrogen and hydrocyanic acid, you know, make oxamide, which is a harmless compound.

"The maid put Mrs. Boncour to bed, saved. I went to my house, a wreck. Since then I have not left this bed. With my legs paralyzed I lie here, expecting each hour to be my last."

"Would you taste an unknown drug again to discover the nature of a probable poison?" asked Craig.

"I don't know," he answered slowly, "but I suppose I would. In such a case a conscientious doctor has no thought of self. He is there to do things, and he does them, according to the best that is in him. In spite of the fact that I haven't had one hour of unbroken sleep since that fatal day, I suppose I would do it again."

When we were leaving, I remarked: "That is a martyr to science. Could anything be more dramatic than his willing penalty for his devotion to medicine?"

We walked along in silence. "Walter, did you notice he said not a word of condemnation of Dixon, though the note was before his eyes? Surely Dixon has some strong supporters in Danbridge, as well as enemies."

The next morning we continued our investigation. We found Dixon's lawyer, Leland, in consultation with his client in the bare cell of the county jail. Dixon proved to be a clear-eyed, clean-cut young man. The thing that impressed me most about him, aside from the prepossession in his favor due to the faith of Alma Willard, was the nerve he displayed, whether guilty or innocent. Even an innocent man might well have been staggered by the circumstantial evidence against him and the high tide of public feeling, in spite of the support that he was receiving. Leland, we learned, had been very active. By prompt work at the time of the young doctor's arrest he had managed to secure the greater part of Dr. Dixon's personal letters, though the prosecutor secured some, the contents of which had not been disclosed.

Kennedy spent most of the day in tracing out the movements of Thurston. Nothing that proved important was turned up and even visits to near-by towns failed to show any sales of cyanide or sublimate to any one not entitled to buy them. Meanwhile, in turning over the gossip of the town, one of the newspapermen ran across the fact that the Boncour bungalow was owned by the Posts, and that Halsey Post, as the executor of the estate, was a more frequent visitor than the mere collection of the rent would warrant. Mrs. Boncour maintained a stolid silence that covered a seething internal fury when the newspaperman in question hinted that the landlord and tenant were on exceptionally good terms.

It was after a fruitless day of such search that we were sitting in the reading-room of the Fairfield Hotel. Leland entered. His face was positively white. Without a word he took us by the arm and led us across Main Street and up a flight of stairs to his office. Then he locked the door.

"What's the matter?" asked Kennedy.

"When I took this case," he said, "I believed down in my heart that Dixon was innocent. I still believe it, but my faith has been rudely shaken. I feel that you should know about what I have just found. As I told you, we secured nearly all of Dr. Dixon's letters. I had not read them all then. But I have been going through them to-night. Here is a letter from Vera Lytton herself. You will notice it is dated the day of her death."

He laid the letter before us. It was written in a curious grayish-black ink in a woman's hand, and read:

DEAR HARRIS:

Since we agreed to disagree we have at least been good friends, if no longer lovers. I am not writing in anger to reproach you with your new love, so soon after the old. I suppose Alma Willard is far better suited to be your wife than is a poor little actress—rather looked down on in this Puritan society here. But there is something I wish to warn you about, for it concerns us all intimately.

We are in danger of an awful mix-up if we don't look out. Mr. Thurston—I had almost said my husband, though I don't know whether that is the truth or not—who has just come over from New York, tells me that there is some doubt about the validity of our divorce. You recall he was in the South at the time I sued him, and the papers were served on him in Georgia. He now says the proof of service was fraudulent and that he can set aside the divorce. In that case you might figure in a suit for alienating my affections.

I do not write this with ill will, but simply to let you know how things stand. If we had married, I suppose I would be guilty of bigamy. At any rate, if he were disposed he could make a terrible scandal.

Oh, Harris, can't you settle with him if he asks anything? Don't forget so soon that we once thought we were going to be the happiest of mortals—at least I did. Don't desert me, or the very earth will cry out against you. I am frantic and hardly know what I am writing. My head aches, but it is my heart that is breaking. Harris, I am yours still, down in my heart, but not to be cast off like an old suit for a new one. You know the old saying about a woman scorned. I beg you not to go back on

Your poor little deserted

VERA.

As we finished reading, Leland exclaimed, "That never must come before the jury."

Kennedy was examining the letter carefully. "Strange," he muttered. "See how it was folded. It was written on the wrong side of the sheet, or rather folded up with the writing outside. Where have these letters been?"

"Part of the time in my safe, part of the time this afternoon on my desk by the window."

"The office was locked, I suppose?" asked Kennedy. "There was no way to slip this letter in among the others since you obtained them?"

"None. The office has been locked, and there is no evidence of any one having entered or disturbed a thing."

He was hastily running over the pile of letters as if looking to see whether they were all there. Suddenly he stopped.

"Yes," he exclaimed excitedly, "one of them *is* gone." Nervously he fumbled through them again. "One is gone," he repeated, looking at us, startled.

"What was is about?" asked Craig.

"It was a note from an artist, Thurston, who gave the address of Mrs. Boncour's bungalow—ah, I see you have heard of him. He asked Dixon's recommendation of a certain patent headache medicine. I thought it possibly evidential, and I asked Dixon about it. He explained it by saying that he did not have a copy of his reply, but as near as he could recall, he wrote that the compound would not cure a headache except at the expense of reducing heart action dangerously. He says he sent no prescription. Indeed, he thought it a scheme to extract advice without incurring the charge for an office call and answered it only because he thought Vera had become reconciled to Thurston again. I can't find that letter of Thurston's. It is gone."

We looked at each other in amazement.

"Why, if Dixon contemplated anything against Miss Lytton, should he preserve this letter from her?" mused Kennedy. "Why didn't he destroy it?"

"That's what puzzles me," remarked Leland. "Do you suppose some one has broken in and substituted this Lytton letter for the Thurston letter?"

Kennedy was scrutinizing the letter, saying nothing. "I may keep it?" he asked at length. Leland was quite willing and even undertook to obtain some specimens of the writing of Vera Lytton. With these and the letter Kennedy was working far into the night and long after I had passed into a land troubled with many wild dreams of deadly poisons and secret intrigues of artists.

The next morning a message from our old friend First Deputy O'Connor in New York told briefly of locating the rooms of an artist named Thurston in one of the cooperative studio apartments. Thurston himself had not been there for several days and was reported to have gone to Maine to sketch. He had had a number of debts, but before he left they had all been paid—strange to say, by a notorious firm of shyster lawyers, Kerr & Kimmel. Kennedy wired back to find out the facts from Kerr & Kimmel and to locate Thurston at any cost.

Even the discovery of the new letter did not shake the wonderful self-possession of Dr. Dixon. He denied ever having received it and repeated his story of a letter from Thurston to which he had replied by sending an answer, care of Mrs. Boncour, as requested. He insisted that the engagement between Miss Lytton and himself had been broken before the announcement of his engagement with Miss Willard. As for Thurston, he said the man was little more than a name to him. He had known perfectly all the circumstances of the divorce, but had had no dealings with Thurston and no fear of him. Again and again he denied ever receiving the letter from Vera Lytton.

Kennedy did not tell the Willards of the new letter. The strain had begun to tell on Alma, and her father had had her quietly taken to a farm of his up in the country. To escape the curious eyes of reporters, Halsey Post had driven up one night in his closed car. She had entered it quickly with her father, and the journey had been made in the car, while Halsey Post had quietly dropped off on the outskirts of the town, where another car was waiting to take him back. It was evident that the Willard family relied implicitly on Halsey, and his assistance to them was most considerate. While he never forced himself forward, he kept in close touch with the progress of the case, and now that Alma was away his watchfulness increased proportionately, and twice a day he wrote a long report which was sent to her.

Kennedy was now bending every effort to locate the missing artist. When he left Danbridge, he seemed to have dropped out of sight completely. However, with O'Connor's aid, the police of all New England were on the lookout.

The Thurstons had been friends of Halsey's before Vera Lytton had ever met Dr. Dixon, we discovered from the Danbridge gossips, and I, at least, jumped to the conclusion that Halsey was shielding the artist, perhaps through a sense of friendship when he found that Kennedy was interested in Thurston's movement. I must say I rather liked Halsey, for he seemed very thoughtful of the Willards, and was never too busy to give an hour or so to any commission they wished carried out without publicity.

Two days passed with not a word from Thurston. Kennedy was obviously getting impatient. One day a rumor was received that he was in Bar Harbor; the next it was a report from Nova Scotia. At last, however, came the welcome news that he had been located in New Hampshire, arrested, and might be expected the next day.

At once Kennedy became all energy. He arranged for a secret conference in Senator Willard's house, the moment the artist was to arrive. The senator and his daughter made a flying trip back to town. Nothing was said to any one about Thurston, but Kennedy quietly arranged with the district attorney to be present with the note and the jar of ammonia properly safeguarded. Leland of course came, although his client could not. Halsey Post seemed only too glad to be with Miss Willard, though he seemed to have lost interest in the case as soon as the Willards returned to look after it themselves. Mrs. Boncour was well enough to attend, and even Dr. Waterworth insisted on coming in a private ambulance which drove over from a near-by city especially for him. The time was fixed just before the arrival of the train that was to bring Thurston.

It was an anxious gathering of friends and foes of Dr. Dixon who sat impatiently waiting for Kennedy to begin this momentous exposition that was to establish the guilt or innocence of the calm young physician who sat impassively in the jail not half a mile from the room where his life and death were being debated.

"In many respects this is the most remarkable case that it has ever been my lot to handle," began Kennedy. "Never before have I felt so keenly my sense of responsibility. Therefore, though this is a somewhat irregular proceeding, let me begin by setting forth the facts as I see them.

"First, let us consider the dead woman. The question that arises here is, Was she murdered or did she commit suicide? I think you will discover the answer as I proceed. Miss Lytton, as you know, was, two years ago, Mrs. Burgess Thurston. The Thurstons had temperament, and temperament is quite often the highway to the divorce court. It was so in this case. Mrs. Thurston discovered that her husband was paying much attention to other women. She sued for divorce in New York, and he accepted service in the South, where he happened to be. At least it was so testified by Mrs. Thurston's lawyer.

"Now here comes the remarkable feature of the case. The law firm of Kerr & Kimmel, I find, not long ago began to investigate the legality of this divorce. Before a notary Thurston made an affidavit that he had never been served by the lawyer for Miss Lytton, as she was now known. Her lawyer is dead, but his representative in the South who served the papers is alive. He was brought to New York and asserted squarely that he had served the papers properly.

"Here is where the shrewdness of Mose Kimmel, the shyster lawyer, came in. He arranged to have the Southern attorney identify the man he had served the paper on. For this purpose he was engaged in conversation with one of his own clerks when the lawyer was due to appear. Kimmel appeared to act confused, as if he had been caught napping. The Southern lawyer, who had seen Thurston only once, fell squarely into the trap and identified the clerk as Thurston. There were plenty of witnesses to it, and it was point number two for the great Mose Kimmel. Papers were drawn up to set aside the divorce decree.

"In the meantime, Miss Lytton, or Mrs. Thurston, had become acquainted with a young doctor in a New York hospital, and had become engaged to him. It matters not that the engagement was later broken. The fact remains that if the divorce were set aside an action would lie against Dr. Dixon for alienating Mrs. Thurston's affections, and a grave scandal would result. I need not add that in this quiet little town of Danbridge the most could be made of such a suit."

Kennedy was unfolding a piece of paper. As he laid it down, Leland, who was sitting next to me, exclaimed under his breath:

"My God, he's going to let the prosecutor know about that letter. Can't you stop him?"

It was too late. Kennedy had already begun to read Vera's letter. It was damning to Dixon, added to the other note found in the ammonia-jar.

When he had finished reading, you could almost hear the throbbing in the room. A scowl overspread Senator Willard's features. Alma Willard was pale and staring wildly at Kennedy. Halsey Post, even solicitous for her, handed her a glass of water from the table. Dr. Waterworth had forgotten his pain in his intense attention, and Mrs. Boncour seemed stunned with astonishment. The prosecuting attorney was eagerly taking notes.

"In some way," pursued Kennedy in an even voice, "this letter was either overlooked in the original correspondence of Dr. Dixon or it was added to it later. I shall come back to that presently. My next point is that Dr. Dixon says he received a letter from Thurston on the day the artist visited the Boncour bungalow. It asked about a certain headache compound, and his reply was brief and, as nearly as I can find out, read, 'This compound will not cure your headache except at the expense of reducing heart action dangerously.'

"Next comes the tragedy. On the evening of the day that Thurston left, after presumably telling Miss Lytton about what Kerr & Kimmel had discovered, Miss Lytton is found dying with a bottle containing cyanide and sublimate beside her. You are all familiar with the circumstances and with the note discovered in the jar of ammonia. Now, if the prosecutor will be so kind as to let me see that note—thank you, sir. This is the identical note. You have all heard the various theories of the jar and have read the note. Here it is in plain, cold black and white—in Dr. Dixon's own handwriting, as you know, and read: 'This will cure your headache. Dr. Dixon.'"

Alma Willard seemed as one paralyzed. Was Kennedy, who had been engaged by her father to defend her fiancé, about to convict him?

"Before we draw the final conclusion," continued Kennedy gravely, "there are one or two points I wish to elaborate. Walter, will you open that door into the main hall?"

I did so, and two policemen stepped in with a prisoner. It was Thurston, but changed almost beyond recognition. His clothes were worn, his beard shaved off, and he had a generally hunted appearance.

Thurston was visibly nervous. Apparently he had heard all that Kennedy had said and intended he should hear, for as he entered he almost broke away from the police officers in his eagerness to speak.

"Before God," he cried dramatically, "I am as innocent as you are of this crime, Professor Kennedy."

"Are you prepared to swear before *me*," almost shouted

Kennedy, his eyes blazing, "that you were never served properly by your wife's lawyers in that suit?"

The man cringed back as if a stinging blow had been delivered between his eyes. As he met Craig's fixed glare he knew there was no hope. Slowly, as if the words were being wrung from him syllable by syllable, he said in a muffled voice:

"No, I perjured myself. I was served in that suit. But——"

"And you swore falsely before Kimmel that you were not?" persisted Kennedy.

"Yes," he murmured. "But——"

"And you are prepared now to make another affidavit to that effect?"

"Yes," he replied. "If——"

"No buts or ifs, Thurston," cried Kennedy sarcastically. 'What did you make that affidavit for? What is *your* story?"

"Kimmel sent for me. I did not go to him. He offered to pay my debts if I would swear to such a statement. I did not ask why or for whom. I swore to it and gave him a list of my creditors. I waited until they were paid. Then my conscience"—I could not help revolting at the thought of conscience in such a wretch, and the word itself seemed to stick in his throat as he went on and saw how feeble an impression he was making on us—"my conscience began to trouble me. I determined to see Vera, tell her all, and find out whether it was she who wanted this statement. I saw her. When at last I told her, she scorned me. I can confirm that, for as I left a man entered. I now knew how grossly I had sinned, in listening to Mose Kimmel. I fled. I disappeared in Maine. I travelled. Every day my money grew less. At last I was overtaken, captured, and brought back here."

He stopped and sank wretchedly down in a chair and covered his face with his hands.

"A likely story," muttered Leland in my ear.

Kennedy was working quickly. Motioning the officers to be seated by Thurston, he uncovered a jar which he had placed on the table. The color had now appeared in Alma's cheeks, as if hope had again sprung in her heart, and I fancied that Halsey Post saw his claim on her favor declining correspondingly.

"I want you to examine the letters in this case with me," continued Kennedy. "Take the letter which I read from Miss Lytton, which was found following the strange disappearance of the note from Thurston."

He dipped a pen into a little bottle, and wrote on a piece of paper:

What is your opinion about Cross's Headache Cure? Would you recommend it for a nervous headache?

BURGESS THURSTON,
c/o MRS. S. BONCOUR.

Craig held up the writing so that we could all see that he had written what Dixon declared Thurston wrote in the note that had disappeared. Then he dipped another pen into a second bottle, and for some time he scrawled on another sheet of paper. He held it up, but it was still perfectly blank.

"Now," he added, "I am going to give a little demonstration which I expect to be successful only in a measure. Here in the open sunshine by this window I am going to place these two sheets of paper side by side. It will take longer than I care to wait to make my demonstration complete, but I can do enough to convince you."

For a quarter of an hour we sat in silence, wondering what he would do next. At last he beckoned us over to the window. As we approached he said, "On sheet number one I have written with quinoline; on sheet number two I wrote with a solution of nitrate of silver."

We bent over. The writing signed "Thurston" on sheet number one was faint, almost imperceptible, but on paper number two, in black letters, appeared what Kennedy had written: "Dear Harris: Since we agreed to disagree we have at least been good friends."

"It is like the start of the substituted letter, and the other is like the missing note," gasped Leland in a daze.

"Yes," said Kennedy quickly. "Leland, no one entered your office. No one stole the Thurston note. No one substituted the Lytton letter. According to your own story, you took them out of the safe and left them in the sunlight all day. The process that had been started earlier in ordinary light, slowly, was now quickly completed. In other words, there was writing which would soon fade away on one side of the paper and writing which was invisible but would soon appear on the other.

"For instance, quinoline rapidly disappears in sunlight. Starch with a slight trace of iodine writes a light blue, which disappears in air. It was something like that used in the Thurston letter. Then, too, silver nitrate dissolved in ammonia gradually turns black as it is acted on by light and air. Or magenta treated with a bleaching-agent in just sufficient quantity to decolorise it is invisible when used for writing. But the original color reappears as the oxygen of the air acts upon the pigment. I haven't a doubt but that my analyses of the inks are correct and on one side quinoline was used and on the other nitrate of silver. This explains the inexplicable disappearance of evidence incriminating one person, Thurston, and the sudden appearance of evidence incriminating another, Dr. Dixon. Sympathetic ink also accounts for the curious circumstance that the Lytton letter was folded up with the writing apparently outside. It was outside and unseen until the sunlight brought it out and destroyed the other, inside, writing—a chance, I suspect, that was intended for the police to see after it was completed, not for the defence to witness as it was taking place.

We looked at each other aghast. Thurston was nervously opening and shutting his lips and moistening them as if he wanted to say something but could not find the words.

"Lastly," went on Craig, utterly regardless of Thurston's frantic efforts to speak, "we come to the note that was discovered so queerly crumpled up in the jar of ammonia on Vera Lytton's dressing-table. I have here a cylindrical glass jar in which I place some sal-ammoniac and quicklime. I will wet it and heat it a little. That produces the pungent gas of ammonia.

"On one side of this third piece of paper I myself write with this mercurous nitrate solution. You see, I leave no mark on the paper as I write. I fold it up and drop it into the jar—and in a few seconds withdraw it. Here is a very quick way of producing something like the slow result of sunlight with silver nitrate. The fumes of ammonia have formed the precipitate of black mercurous nitrate, a very distinct black writing which is almost indelible. That is what is technically called invisible rather than sympathetic ink."

We leaned over to read what he had written. It was the same as the note incriminating Dixon:

> This will cure your headache.
>
> Dr. Dixon.

A servant entered with a telegram from New York. Scarcely stopping in his exposure, Kennedy tore it open, read it hastily, stuffed it into his pocket, and went on.

"Here in this fourth bottle I have an acid solution of iron chloride, diluted until the writing is invisible when dry," he hurried on. "I will just make a few scratches on this fourth sheet of paper—so. It leaves no mark. But it has the remarkable property of becoming red in vapor of sulpho-cyanide. Here is a long-necked flask of the gas, made by sulphuric acid acting on potassium sulpho-cyanide. Keep back, Dr. Waterworth, for it would be very dangerous for you to get even a whiff of this in your condition. Ah! See—the scratches I made on the paper are red."

Then hardly giving us more than a moment to let the fact impress itself on our minds, he seized the piece of paper and dashed it into the jar of ammonia. When he withdrew it, it was just a plain sheet of white paper again. The red marks which the gas in the flask had brought out of nothingness had been effaced by the ammonia. They had gone and left no trace.

"In this way I can alternately make the marks appear and disappear by using the sulpho-cyanide and the ammonia. Whoever wrote this note with Dr. Dixon's name on it must have had the doctor's reply to the Thurston letter containing the words, 'This will not cure your headache.' He carefully traced the words, holding the genuine note up to the light with a piece of paper over it, leaving out the word 'not' and using only such words as he needed. This note was then destroyed.

"But he forgot that after he had brought out the red writing by the use of the sulpho-cyanide, and though he could count on Vera Lytton's placing the note in the jar of ammonia and hence obliterating the writing, while at the same time the invisible writing in the mercurous nitrate involving Dr. Dixon's name would be brought out by the ammonia indelibly on the other side of the note—he forgot"—Kennedy was now speaking eagerly and loudly—"that the sulpho-cyanide vapors could always be made to bring back to accuse him the words that the ammonia had blotted out."

Before the prosecutor could interfere, Kennedy had picked up the note found in the ammonia-jar beside the dying girl and had jammed the state's evidence into the long-necked flask of sulpho-cyanide vapor.

"Don't fear," he said, trying to pacify the now furious prosecutor, "it will do nothing to the Dixon writing. That is permanent now, even if it is only a tracing."

When he withdrew the note, there was writing on both sides, the black of the original note and something in red on the other side.

We crowded around, and Craig read it with as much interest as any of us:

"Before taking the headache-powder, be sure to place the contents of this paper in a jar with a little warm water."

"Hum," commented Craig, "this was apparently written on the outside wrapper of a paper folded about some sal-ammoniac and quicklime. It goes on:

" 'Just drop the whole thing in, *paper and all*. Then if you feel a faintness from the medicine the ammonia will quickly restore you. One spoonful of the headache-powder swallowed quickly is enough.' "

No name was signed to the directions, but they were plainly written, and *"paper and all"* was underscored heavily.

Craig pulled out some letters. "I have here specimens of writing of many persons connected with this case, but I can see at a glance which one corresponds to the writing on this red death-warrant by an almost inhuman fiend. I shall, however, leave that part of it to the handwriting experts to determine at the trial. Thurston, who was the man whom you saw enter the Boncour bungalow as you left—the constant visitor?"

Thurston had not yet regained his self-control, but with trembling forefinger he turned and pointed to Halsey Post.

"Yes, ladies and gentlemen," cried Kennedy as he slapped the telegram that had just come from New York down on the table decisively, "yes, the real client of Kerr & Kimmel, who bent Thurston to his purposes, was Halsey Post, once secret lover of Vera Lytton till threatened by scandal in Danbridge—Halsey Post, graduate in technology, student of sympathetic inks, forger of the Vera Lytton letter and the other notes, and dealer in cyanides in the silver-smithing business, fortune-hunter for the Willard millions with which to recoup the Post & Vance losses, and hence rival of Dr. Dixon for the love of Alma Willard. That is the man who wielded the poisoned pen. Dr. Dixon is innocent."

The Invisible Ray

BY ARTHUR B. REEVE

The Invisible Ray

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"I WON'T deny that I had some expectations from the old man myself."

Kennedy's client was speaking in a low, full-chested, vibrating voice, with some emotion, so low that I had entered the room without being aware that any one was there until it was too late to retreat.

"As his physician for over twelve years," the man pursued, "I certainly had been led to hope to be remembered in his will. But, Professor Kennedy, I can't put it too strongly when I say that there is no selfish motive in my coming to you about the case. There is something wrong—depend on that."

Craig had glanced up at me and, as I hesitated, I could see in an instant that the speaker was a practitioner of a type that is rapidly passing away, the old-fashioned family doctor.

"Dr. Burnham, I should like to have you know Mr. Jameson," introduced Craig. "You can talk as freely before him as you have to me alone. We always work together."

I shook hands with the visitor.

"The doctor has succeeded in interesting me greatly in a case which has some unique features," Kennedy explained. "It has to do with Stephen Haswell, the eccentric old millionaire of Brooklyn. Have you ever heard of him?"

"Yes, indeed," I replied, recalling an occasional article which had appeared in the newspapers regarding a dusty and dirty old house in that part of the Heights in Brooklyn whence all that is fashionable had not yet taken flight, a house of mystery, yet not more mysterious than its owner in his secretive comings and goings in the affairs of men of a generation beyond his time. Further than the facts that he was reputed to be very wealthy and led, in the heart of a great city, what was as nearly like the life of a hermit as possible, I knew little or nothing. "What has he been doing now?" I asked.

"About a week ago," repeated the doctor, in answer to a nod of encouragement from Kennedy, "I was summoned in the middle of the night to attend Mr. Haswell, who, as I have been telling Professor Kennedy, had been a patient of mine for over twelve years. He had been suddenly stricken with total blindness. Since then he appears to be failing fast, that is, he appeared so the last time I saw him, a few days ago, after I had been superseded by a younger man. It is a curious case and I have thought about it a great deal. But I didn't like to speak to the authorities; there wasn't enough to warrant that, and I should have been laughed out of court for my pains. The more I have thought about it, however, the more I have felt it my duty to say something to somebody, and so, having heard of Professor Kennedy, I decided to consult him. The fact of the matter is, I very much fear that there are circumstances which will bear sharp looking into, perhaps a scheme to get control of the old man's fortune."

The doctor paused, and Craig inclined his head, as much as to signify his appreciation of the delicate position in which Burnham stood in the case. Before the doctor could proceed further, Kennedy handed me a letter which had been lying before him on the table. It had evidently been torn into small pieces and then carefully pasted together.

The superscription gave a small town in Ohio and a date about a fortnight previous.

Dear Father [it read]: I hope you will pardon me for writing, but I cannot let the occasion of your seventy-fifth birthday pass without a word of affection and congratulation. I am alive and well—Time has dealt leniently with me in that respect, if not in money matters. I do not say this in the hope of reconciling you to me. I know that is impossible after all these cruel years. But I do wish that I could see you again. Remember, I am your only child and even if you still think I have been a foolish one, please let me come to see you once before it is too late. We are constantly traveling from place to place, but shall be here for a few days.

Your loving daughter,
GRACE HASWELL MARTIN.

"Some fourteen or fifteen years ago," explained the doctor as I looked up from reading the note, "Mr. Haswell's only daughter eloped with an artist named Martin. He had been engaged to paint a portrait of the late Mrs. Haswell from a photograph. It was the first time that Grace Haswell had ever been able to find expression for the artistic yearning which had always been repressed by the cold, practical sense of her father. She remembered her mother perfectly since the sad bereavement of her girlhood and naturally she watched and helped the artist eagerly. The result was a portrait which might well have been painted from the subject herself rather than from a cold photograph.

"Haswell saw the growing intimacy of his daughter and the artist. His bent of mind was solely toward money and material things, and he at once conceived a bitter and unreasoning hatred for Martin, who, he believed, had 'schemed' to capture his daughter and an easy living. Art was as foreign to his nature as possible. Nevertheless they went ahead and married, and, well, it resulted in the old man disinheriting the girl. The young couple disappeared bravely to make their way by their chosen profession and, as far as I know, have never been heard from since until now. Haswell made a new will and I have always understood that practically all of his fortune is to be devoted to founding the technology department in a projected university of Brooklyn."

"You have never seen this Mrs. Martin or her husband?" asked Kennedy.

"No, never. But in some way she must have learned that I had some influence with her father, for she wrote to me not long ago, enclosing a note for him and asking me to intercede for her. I did so. I took the letter to him as diplomatically as I could. The old man flew into a towering rage, refused even to look at the letter, tore it up into bits, and ordered me never to mention the subject to him again. That is her note, which I saved. However, it is the sequel about which I wish your help."

The physician folded up the patched letter carefully before he continued. "Mr. Haswell, as you perhaps know, has for many years been a prominent figure in various curious speculations or rather in loaning money to many curious speculators. It is not necessary to go into the different schemes which he has helped to finance. Even though most of them have been unknown to the public they have certainly given him such a reputation that he is much sought after by inventors.

"Not long ago Haswell became interested in the work of an obscure chemist over in Brooklyn, Morgan Prescott. Prescott claims, as I understand, to be able to transmute copper into gold. Whatever you think of it offhand, you should visit his laboratory yourselves, gentlemen. I am told it is wonderful, though I have never seen it and can't explain it. I have met Prescott several times while he was trying to persuade Mr. Haswell to back him in his scheme, but he was never disposed to talk to me, for I had no money to invest. So far as I know about it the thing sounds scientific and plausible enough. I leave you to judge of that. It is only an incident in my story and I will pass over it quickly. Prescott, then, believes that the elements are merely progressive variations of an original substance or base called 'protyle,' from which everything is derived. But this fellow Prescott goes much further than any of the former theorists. He does not stop with matter. He believes that he has the secret of life also, that he can make the transition from the inorganic to the organic, from inert matter to living protoplasm, and thence from living protoplasm to mind and what we call soul, whatever that may be."

"And here is where the weird and uncanny part of it comes in," commented Craig, turning from the doctor to me to call my attention particularly to what was about to follow.

"Having arrived at the point where he asserts that he can create and destroy matter, life, and mind," continued the doctor, as if himself fascinated by the idea, "Prescott very naturally does not have to go far before he also claims a control over telepathy and even a communication with the dead. He even calls the messages which he receives by a word which he has coined himself, 'telepagrams.' Thus he says he has unified the physical, the physiological, and the psychical—a system of absolute scientific monism."

The doctor paused again, then resumed. "One afternoon, about a week ago, apparently, as far as I am able to piece together the story, Prescott was demonstrating his marvellous discovery of the unity of nature. Suddenly he faced Mr. Haswell.

"'Shall I tell you a fact, sir, about yourself?' he asked quickly. 'The truth as I see it by means of my wonderful invention? If it is the truth, will you believe in me? Will you put money into my invention? Will you share in becoming fabulously rich?'

"Haswell made some noncommittal answer. But Prescott seemed to look into the machine through a very thick plate-glass window, with Haswell placed directly before it. He gave a cry. 'Mr. Haswell,' he exclaimed, 'I regret to tell you what I see. You have disinherited your daughter; she has passed out of your life and at the present moment you do not know where she is.'

"'That's true,' replied the old man bitterly, 'and more than that I don't care. Is that all you see? That's nothing new.'

"'No, unfortunately, that is not all I see. Can you bear something further? I think you ought to know it. I have here a most mysterious telepagram.'

"'Yes. What is it? Is she dead?'

"'No, it is not about her. It is about yourself. To-night at midnight or perhaps a little later,' repeated Prescott solemnly, 'you will lose your sight as a punishment for your action.'

"'Pouf!' exclaimed the old man in a dudgeon, 'if that is all your invention can tell me, good-bye. You told me you were able to make gold. Instead, you make foolish prophecies. I'll put no money into such tomfoolery. I'm a practical man,' and with that he stamped out of the laboratory.

"Well, that night, about one o'clock, in the silence of the lonely old house, the aged caretaker, Jane, whom he had hired after he banished his daughter from his life, heard a wild shout of 'Help! Help!' Haswell, alone in his room on the second floor, was groping about in the dark.

" 'Jane,' he ordered, 'a light—a light.'

" 'I have lighted the gas, Mr. Haswell,' she cried.

"A groan followed. He had himself found a match, had struck it, had even burnt his fingers with it, yet he saw nothing.

"The blow had fallen. At almost the very hour which Prescott, by means of his weird telepagram, had predicted, old Haswell was stricken.

" 'I'm blind,' he gasped. 'Send for Dr. Burnham.'

"I went to him immediately when the maid roused me, but there was nothing I could do except prescribe perfect rest for his eyes and keeping in a dark room in the hope that his sight might be restored as suddenly and miraculously as it had been taken away.

"The next morning, with his own hand, trembling and scrawling in his blindness, he wrote the following on a piece of paper:

" 'MRS. GRACE MARTIN.—Information wanted about the present whereabouts of Mrs. Grace Martin, formerly Grace Haswell of Brooklyn.

STEPHEN HASWELL,
—— Pierrepont St., Brooklyn.

"This advertisement he caused to be placed in all the New York papers and to be wired to the leading Western papers. Haswell himself was a changed man after his experience. He spoke bitterly of Prescott, yet his attitude toward his daughter was completely reversed. Whether he admitted to himself a belief in the prediction of the inventor, I do not know. Certainly he scouted such an idea in telling me about it.

"A day or two after the advertisements appeared a telegram came to the old man from a little town in Indiana. It read simply: 'Dear Father: Am starting for Brooklyn to-day. Grace.'

"The upshot was that Grace Haswell, or rather Grace Martin, appeared the next day, forgave and was forgiven with much weeping, although the old man still refused resolutely to be reconciled with and receive her husband. Mrs. Martin started in to clean up the old house. A vacuum cleaner sucked a ton or two of dust from it. Everything was changed. Jane grumbled a great deal, but there was no doubt a great improvement. Meals were served regularly. The old man was taken care of as never before. Nothing was too good for him. Everywhere the touch of a woman was evident in the house. The change was complete. It even extended to me. Some friend had told her of an eye and ear specialist, a Dr. Scott, who was engaged. Since then, I understand, a new will has been made, much to the chagrin of the trustees of the projected school. Of course I am cut out of the new will, and that with the knowledge at least of the woman who once appealed to me, but it does not influence me in coming to you."

"But what has happened since to arouse suspicion?" asked Kennedy, watching the doctor furtively.

"Why, the fact is that, in spite of all this added care, the old man is failing more rapidly than ever. He never goes out except attended and not much even then. The other day I happened to meet Jane on the street. The faithful old soul poured forth a long story about his growing dependence on others and ended by mentioning a curious red discoloration that seems to have broken out over his face and hands. More from the way she said it than from what she said I gained the impression that something was going on which should be looked into."

"Then you perhaps think that Prescott and Mrs. Martin are in some way connected in this case?" I hazarded.

I had scarcely framed the question before he replied in an emphatic negative. "On the contrary, it seems to me that if they know each other at all it is with hostility. With the exception of the first stroke of blindness"—here he lowered his voice earnestly—"practically every misfortune that has overtaken Mr. Haswell has been since the advent of this new Dr. Scott. Mind, I do not wish even to breathe that Mrs. Martin has done anything except what a daughter should do. I think she has shown herself a model of forgiveness and devotion. Nevertheless the turn of events under the new treatment has been so strange that almost it makes one believe that there might be something occult about it—or wrong with the new doctor."

"Would it be possible, do you think, for us to see Mr. Haswell?" asked Kennedy, when Dr. Burnham had come to a full stop after pouring forth his suspicions. "I should like to see this Dr. Scott. But first I should like to get into the old house without exciting hostility."

The doctor was thoughtful. "You'll have to arrange that yourself," he answered. "Can't you think up a scheme? For instance, go to him with a proposal like the old schemes he used to finance. He is very much interested in electrical inventions. He made his money by speculation in telegraphs and telephones in the early days when they were more or less dreams. I should think a wireless system of television might at least interest him and furnish an excuse for getting in, although I am told his daughter discourages all tangible investment in the schemes that used to interest his active mind."

"An excellent idea," exclaimed Kennedy. "It is worth trying anyway. It is still early. Suppose we ride over to Brooklyn with you. You can direct us to the house and we'll try to see him."

It was still light when we mounted the high steps of the house of mystery across the bridge. Mrs. Martin, who met us in the parlor, proved to be a stunning looking woman with brown hair and beautiful dark eyes. As far as we could see the old house plainly showed the change. The furniture and ornaments were of a period long past, but everything was scrupulously neat. Hanging over the old marble mantel was a painting which quite evidently was that of the long since deceased Mrs. Haswell, the mother of Grace. In spite of the hideous style of dress of the period after the war, she had evidently been a very beautiful woman with large masses of light chestnut hair and blue eyes which the painter had succeeded in catching with almost life-likeness for a portrait.

It took only a few minutes for Kennedy, in his most engaging and plausible manner, to state the hypothetical reason of our call. Though it was perfectly self-evident from the start that Mrs. Martin would throw cold water on anything requiring an outlay of money Craig accomplished his full purpose of securing an interview with Mr. Haswell. The invalid lay propped up in bed, and as we entered he heard us and turned his sightless eyes in our direction almost as if he saw.

Kennedy had hardly begun to repeat and elaborate the story which he had already told regarding his mythical friend who had at last a commercial wireless "televue," as he called it on the spur of the moment, when Jane, the aged caretaker, announced Dr. Scott. The new doctor was a youthfully dressed man, clean-shaven, but with an undefinable air of being much older than his smooth face led one to suppose. As he had a large practice, he said, he would beg our pardon for interrupting but would not take long.

It needed no great powers of observation to see that the old man placed great reliance on his new doctor and that the visit partook of a social as well as a professional nature. Although they talked low we could catch now and then a word or phrase. Dr. Scott bent down and examined the eyes of his patient casually. It was difficult to believe that they saw nothing, so bright was the blue of the iris.

"Perfect rest for the present," the doctor directed, talking more to Mrs. Martin than to the old man. "Perfect rest, and then when his health is good, we shall see what can be done with that cataract."

He was about to leave, when the old man reached up and restrained him, taking hold of the doctor's wrist tightly, as if to pull him nearer in order to whisper to him without being overheard. Kennedy was sitting in a chair near the head of the bed, some feet away, as the doctor leaned down. Haswell, still holding his wrist, pulled him closer. I could not hear what was said, though somehow I had an impression that they were talking about Prescott, for it would not have been at all strange if the old man had been greatly impressed by the alchemist.

Kennedy, I noticed, had pulled an old envelope from his pocket and was apparently engaged in jotting down some notes, glancing now and then from his writing to the doctor and then to Mr. Haswell.

The doctor stood erect in a few moments and rubbed his wrist thoughtfully with the other hand, as if it hurt. At the same time he smiled on Mrs. Martin. "Your father has a good deal of strength yet, Mrs. Martin," he remarked. "He has a wonderful constitution. I feel sure that we can pull him out of this and that he has many, many years to live."

Mr. Haswell, who caught the words eagerly, brightened visibly, and the doctor passed out. Kennedy resumed his dscription of the supposed wireless picture apparatus which was to revolutionize the newspaper, the theatre, and daily life in general. The old man did not seem enthusiastic and turned to his daughter with some remark.

"Just at present," commented the daughter, with an air of finality, "the only thing my father is much interested in is a way in which to recover his sight without an operation. He has just had a rather unpleasant experience with one inventor. I think it will be some time before he cares to embark in any other such schemes."

Kennedy and I excused ourselves with appropriate remarks of disappointment. From his preoccupied manner it was impossible for me to guess whether Craig had accomplished his purpose or not.

"Let us drop in on Dr. Burnham since we are over here," he said when we had reached the street. 'I have some questions to ask him."

The former physician of Mr. Haswell lived not very far from the house we had just left. He appeared a little surprised to see us so soon, but very interested in what had taken place.

"Who is this Dr. Scott?" asked Craig when we were seated in the comfortable leather chairs of the old-fashioned consulting-room.

"Really, I know no more about him than you do," replied Burnham. I thought I detected a little of professional jealousy in his tone, though he went on frankly enough, "I have made inquiries and I can find out nothing except that he is supposed to be a graduate of some Western medical school and came to this city only a short time ago. He has hired a small office in a new building devoted entirely to doctors and they tell me that he is an eye and ear specialist, though I cannot see that he has any practice. Beyond that I know nothing about him."

"Your friend Prescott interests me, too," remarked Kennedy, changing the subject quickly.

"Oh, he is no friend of mine," returned the doctor, fumbling in a drawer of his desk. "But I think I have one of his cards here which he gave me when we were introduced some time ago at Mr. Haswell's. I should think it would be worth while to see him. Although he has no use for me because I have neither money nor influence, still you might take this card. Tell him you are from the university, that I have interested you in him, that you know a trustee with money to invest—anything you like that is plausible. When are you going to see him?"

"The first thing in the morning," replied Kennedy. "After I have seen him I shall drop in for another chat with you. Will you be here?"

The doctor promised, and we took our departure.

Prescott's laboratory, which we found the next day from the address on the card, proved to be situated in one of the streets near the waterfront under the bridge approach, where the factories and warehouses clustered thickly. It was with a great deal of anticipation of seeing something happen that we threaded our way through the maze of streets with the cobweb structure of the bridge, carrying its endless succession of cars arching high over our heads. We had nearly reached the place when Kennedy paused and pulled out two pairs of glasses, those huge round tortoiseshell affairs.

"You needn't mind these, Walter," he explained. "They are only plain glass, that is, not ground. You can see through them as well as through air. We must be careful not to excite suspicion. Perhaps a disguise might have been better, but I think this will do. There—they add at least a decade to your age. If you could see yourself you wouldn't speak to your reflection. You look as scholarly as a Chinese mandarin. Remember, let me do the talking and do just as I do."

We had now entered the shop, stumbled up the dark stairs, and presented Dr. Burnham's card with a word of explanation along the lines which he had suggested. Prescott, surrounded by his retorts, crucibles, burettes, and condensers, received us much more graciously than I had had any reason to anticipate. He was a man in the late forties, his face covered with a thick beard, and his eyes, which seemed a little weak, were helped out with glasses almost as scholarly as ours.

I could not help thinking that we three bespectacled figures lacked only the flowing robes to be taken for a group of mediæval alchemists set down a few centuries out of our time in the murky light of Precott's sanctum. Yet, though he accepted us at our face value, and began to talk of his strange discoveries there was none of the old familiar prating about matrix and flux, elixir, magisterium, magnum opus, the mastery and the quintessence, those alternate names for the philosopher's stone which Paracelsus, Simon Forman, Jerome Cardan, and the other mediæval worthies indulged in. This experience at least was as up-to-date as the Curies, Becquerel, Ramsay, and the rest.

"Transmutation," remarked Prescott, "was, as you know, finally declared to be a scientific absurdity in the eighteenth century. But I may say that it is no longer so regarded. I do not ask you to believe anything until you have seen; all I ask is that you maintain the same open mind which the most progressive scientists of to-day exhibit in regard to the subject."

Kennedy had seated himself some distance from a curious piece or rather collection of apparatus over which Prescott was working. It consisted of numerous coils and tubes.

"It may seem strange to you, gentlemen," Prescott proceeded, "that a man who is able to produce gold from, say, copper should be seeking capital from other people. My best answer to that old objection is that I am not seeking capital, as such. The situation with me is simply this. Twice I have applied to the patent office for a patent on my invention. They not only refuse to grant it, but they refuse to consider the application or even to give me a chance to demonstrate my process to them. On the other hand, suppose I try this thing secretly. How can I prevent any one from learning my trade secret, leaving me, and making gold on his own account? Men will desert as fast as I educate them. Think of the economic result of that; it would turn the world topsy-turvy. I am looking for some one who can be trusted to the last limit to join with me, furnish the influence and standing while I furnish the brains and the invention. Either we must get the government interested and sell the invention to it, or we must get government protection and special legislation. I am not seeking capital; I am seeking protection. First let me show you something."

He turned a switch, and a part of the collection of apparatus began to vibrate.

"You are undoubtedly acquainted with the modern theories of matter," he began, plunging into the explanation of his process. "Starting with the atom, we believe no longer that it is indivisible. Atoms are composed of thousands of ions, as they are called—really little electric charges. Again, you know that we have found that all the elements fall into groups. Each group has certain related atomic weights and properties which can be and have been predicted in advance of the discovery of missing elements in the group. I started with the reasonable assumption that the atom of one element in a group could be modified so as to become the atom of another element in the group, that one group could perhaps be transformed into another, and so on, if only I knew the force that would change the number or modify the vibrations of these ions composing the various atoms.

"Now for years I have been seeking that force or combination of forces that would enable me to produce this change in the elements—raising or lowering them in the scale, so to speak. I have found it. I am not going to tell you or any other man whom you may interest the secret of how it is done until I find some one I can trust as I trust myself. But I am none the less willing that you should see the results. If they are not convincing, then nothing can be."

He appeared to be debating whether to explain further, and finally resumed: "Matter thus being in reality a manifestation of force or ether in motion, it is necessary to change and control that force and motion. This assemblage of machines here is for that purpose. Now a few words as to my theory."

He took a pencil and struck a sharp blow on the table. "There you have a single blow," he said, "just one isolated noise. Now if I strike this tuning fork you have a vibrating note. In other words, a succession of blows or wave vibrations of a certain kind affects the ear and we call it sound, just as a succession of other wave vibrations affects the retina and we have sight. If a moving picture moves slower than a certain number of pictures a minute you see the separate pictures; faster it is one moving picture.

"Now as we increase the rapidity of wave vibration and decrease the wave length we pass from sound waves to heat waves or what are known as the infra-red waves, those which lie below the red in the spectrum of light. Next we come to light, which is composed of the seven colors as you know from seeing them resolved in a prism. After that are what are known as the ultra-violet rays, which lie beyond the violet of white light. We also have electric waves, the waves of the alternating current, and shorter still we find the Hertzian waves, which are used in wireless. We have only begun to know of X-rays and the alpha, beta, and gamma rays from them, of radium, radioactivity, and finally of this new force which I have discovered and call 'protodyne,' the original force.

"In short, we find in the universe Matter, Force, and Ether. Matter is simply ether in motion, is composed of corpuscles, electrically charged ions, or electrons, moving units of negative electricity about one one-thousandth part of the hydrogen atom. Matter is made up of electricity and nothing but electricity. Let us see what that leads to. You are acquainted with Mendeléeff's periodic table?"

He drew forth a huge chart on which all the eighty or so elements were arranged in eight groups or octaves and twelve series. Selecting one, he placed his finger on the letters "Au," under which was written the number, 197.2. I wondered what the mystic letters and figures meant.

"That," he explained, "is the scientific name for the element gold and the figure is its atomic weight. You will see," he added, pointing down the second vertical column on the chart, "that gold belongs to the hydrogen group—hydrogen, lithium, sodium, potassium, copper, rubidium, silver, caesium, then two blank spaces for elements yet to be discovered to science, then gold, and finally another unknown element."

Running his finger along the eleventh, horizontal series, he continued: "The gold series—not the group—reads gold, mercury, thallium, lead, bismuth, and other elements known only to myself. For the known elements, however, these groups and series are now perfectly recognized by all scientists; they are determined by the fixed weight of the atom, and there is a close approximation to regularity.

"This twelfth series is interesting. So far only radium, thorium, and uranium are generally known. We know that the radioactive elements are constantly breaking down, and one often hears uranium, for instance, called the 'parent' of radium. Radium also gives off an emanation, and among its products is helium, quite another element. Thus the transmutation of matter is well known within certain bounds to all scientists to-day like yourself, Professor Kennedy. It has even been rumored but never proved that copper has been transformed into lithium—both members of the hydrogen-gold group, you will observe. Copper to lithium is going backward, so to speak. It has remained for me to devise this protodyne apparatus by which I can reverse that process of decay and go forward in the table, so to put it—can change lithium into copper and copper into gold. I can create and destroy matter by protodyne."

He had been fingering a switch as he spoke. Now he turned it on triumphantly. A curious snapping and crackling noise followed, becoming more rapid, and as it mounted in intensity I could smell a pungent odor of ozone which told of an electric discharge. On went the machine until we could feel heat radiating from it. Then came a piercing burst of greenish-blue light from a long tube which looked like a curious mercury vapor lamp.

After a few minutes of this Prescott took a small crucible of black lead. "Now we are ready to try it," he cried in great excitement. "Here I have a crucible containing some copper. Any substance in the group would do, even hydrogen if there was any way I could handle the gas. I place it in the machine—so. Now, if you could watch inside you would see it change; it is now rubidium, now silver, now caesium. Now it is a hitherto unknown element which I have named after myself, presium, now a second unknown element, cottium—ah! there we have gold."

He drew forth the crucible, and there glowed in it a little bead or globule of molten gold.

"I could have taken lead or mercury and by varying the process done the same thing with the gold series as well as the gold group," he said, regarding the globule with obvious pride. "And I can put this gold back and bring it out copper or hydrogen, or better yet, can advance it instead of cause it to decay, and can get a radioactive element which I have named morganium—after my first name, Morgan Prescott. Morganium is a radioactive element next in the series to radium and much more active. Come closer and examine the gold."

Kennedy shook his head as if perfectly satisfied to accept the result. As for me I knew not what to think. It was all so plausible and there was the bead of gold, too, that I turned to Craig for enlightenment. Was he convinced? His face was inscrutable.

But as I looked I could see that Kennedy had been holding concealed in the palm of his hand a bit of what might be a mineral. From my position I could see the bit of mineral glowing, but Prescott could not.

"Might I ask," interrupted Kennedy, "what that curious greenish or bluish light from the tube is composed of?"

Prescott eyed him keenly for an instant through his thick glasses. Craig had shifted his gaze from the bit of mineral in his own hand, but was not looking at the light. He seemed to be indifferently contemplating Prescott's hand as it rested on the switch.

"That, sir," replied Prescott slowly, "is an emanation due to this new force, protodyne, which I use. It is a manifestation of energy, sir, that may run changes not only through the whole gamut of the elements, but is capable of transforming the ether itself into matter, matter into life, and life into mind. It is the outward sign of the unity of nature, the—"

"The means by which you secure the curious telepagrams I have heard of?" inquired Kennedy eagerly.

Prescott looked at him sharply, and for a moment I thought his face seemed to change from a livid white to an apoplectic red, although it may have been only the play of the weird light. When he spoke it was with no show of even suppressed surprise.

"Yes," he answered calmly. "I see that you have heard something of them. I had a curious case a few days ago. I had hoped to interest a certain capitalist of high standing in this city. I had showed him just what I have showed you, and I think he was impressed by it. Then I thought to clinch the matter by a telepagram, but for some reason or other I failed to consult the forces I control as to the wisdom of doing so. Had I, I should have known better. But I went ahead in self-confidence and enthusiasm. I told him of a long banished daughter with whom, in his heart, he was really wishing to become reconciled but was too proud to say the word. He resented it. He started to stamp out of this room, but not before I had another telepagram which told of a misfortune that was soon to overtake the old man himself. If he had given me a chance I might have saved him, at least have flashed a telepagram to that daughter myself, but he gave me no chance. He was gone.

"I do not know precisely what happened after that, but in some way this man found his daughter, and to-day she is living with him. As for my hopes of getting assistance from him, I lost them from the moment when I made my initial mistake of telling him something distasteful. The daughter hates me and I hate her. I have learned that she never ceases advising the old man against all schemes for investment except those bearing moderate interest and readily realized on. Dr. Burnham—I see you know him—has been susperseded by another doctor, I believe. Well, well, I am through with that incident. I must get assistance from other sources. The old man, I think, would have tricked me out of the fruits of my discovery anyhow. Perhaps I am fortunate. Who knows?"

A knock at the door cut him short. Prescott opened it, and a messenger boy stood there. "Is Professor Kennedy here?" he inquired.

Craig motioned to the boy, signed for the message, and tore it open. "It is from Dr. Burnham," he exclaimed, handing the message to me.

"Mr. Haswell is dead," I read. "Looks to me like asphyxiation by gas or some other poison. Come immediately to his house. Burnham."

"You will pardon me," broke in Craig to Prescott, who was regarding us without the slightest trace of emotion, "but Mr. Haswell, the old man to whom I know you referred, is dead, and Dr. Burnham wishes to see me immediately. It was only yesterday that I saw Mr. Haswell and he seemed in pretty good health and spirits. Prescott, though there was no love lost between you and the old man, I would esteem it a great favor if you would accompany me to the house. You need not take any responsibility unless you desire."

His words were courteous enough, but Craig spoke in a tone of quiet authority which Prescott found it impossible to deny. Kennedy had already started to telephone to his own laboratory, describing a certain suitcase to one of his students and giving his directions. It was only a moment later that we were panting up the sloping street that led from the river front. In the excitement I scarcely noticed where we were going until we hurried up the steps to the Haswell house.

The aged caretaker met us at the door. She was in tears. Upstairs in the front room where we had first met the old man we found Dr. Burnham working frantically over him. It took only a minute to learn what had happened. The faithful Jane had noticed an odor of gas in the hall, had traced it to Mr. Haswell's room, had found him unconscious, and instinctively, forgetting the new Dr. Scott, had rushed forth for Dr. Burnham. Near the bed stood Grace Martin, pale but anxiously watching the efforts of the doctor to rescuscitate the blue-faced man who was stretched cold and motionless on the bed.

Dr. Burnham paused in his efforts as we entered. "He is dead, all right," he whispered, aside. "I have tried everything I know to bring him back, but he is beyond help."

There was still a sickening odor of illuminating gas in the room, although the windows were now all open.

Kennedy, with provoking calmness in the excitement, turned from and ignored Dr. Burnham. "Have you summoned Dr. Scott?" he asked Mrs. Martin.

"No," she replied, surprised. "Should I have done so?"

"Yes. Send Jane immediately. Mr. Prescott, will you kindly be seated for a few moments."

Taking off his coat, Kennedy advanced to the bed where the emaciated figure lay, cold and motionless. Craig knelt down at Mr. Haswell's head and took the inert arms, raising them up until they were extended straight. Then be brought them down, folded upward at the elbow at the side. Again and again he tried this Sylvester method of inducing respiration, but with no more result than Dr. Burnham had secured. He turned the body over on its face and tried the new Schaefer method. There seemed to be not a spark of life left.

"Dr. Scott is out," reported the maid breathlessly, "but they are trying to locate him from his office, and if they do they will send him around immediately."

A ring at the doorbell caused us to think that he had been found, but it proved to be the student to whom Kennedy had telephoned at his own laboratory. He was carrying a heavy suitcase and a small tank.

Kennedy opened the suitcase hastily and disclosed a little motor, some long tubes of rubber fitting into a small rubber cap, forceps, and other paraphernalia. The student quickly attached one tube to the little tank, while Kennedy grasped the tongue of the dead man with the forceps, pulled it up off the soft palate, and fitted the rubber cap snugly over his mouth and nose.

"This is the Draeger pulmotor," he explained as he worked, "devised to resuscitate persons who have died of electric shock, but actually found to be of more value in cases of asphyxiation. Start the motor."

The pulmotor began to pump. One could see the dead man's chest rise as it was inflated with oxygen forced by the accordion bellows from the tank through one of the tubes into the lungs. Then it fell as the oxygen and the poisonous gas were slowly sucked out through the other tube. Again and again the process was repeated, about ten times a minute.

Dr. Burnham looked on in undisguised amazement. He had long since given up all hope. The man was dead, medically dead, as dead as ever was any gas victim at this stage on whom all the usual methods of resuscitation had been tried and had failed.

Still, minute after minute, Kennedy worked faithfully on, trying to discover some spark of life and to fan it into flame. At last, after what seemed to be a half-hour of unremitting effort, when the oxygen had long since been exhausted and only fresh air was being pumped into the lungs and out of them, there was a first faint glimmer of life in the heart and a touch of color in the cheeks. Haswell was coming to. Another half-hour found him muttering and rambling weakly.

"The letter—the letter," he moaned, rolling his glazed eyes about. "Where is the letter? Send for Grace."

The moan was so audible that it was startling. It was like a voice from the grave. What did it all mean? Mrs. Martin was at his side in a moment.

"Father, father,—here I am—Grace. What do you want?"

The old man moved restlessly, feverishly, and pressed his trembling hand to his forehead as if trying to collect his thoughts. He was weak, but it was evident that he had been saved.

The pulmotor had been stopped. Craig threw the cap to his student to be packed up, and as he did so he remarked quietly, "I could wish that Dr. Scott had been found. There are some matters here that might interest him.

He paused and looked slowly from the rescued man lying dazed on the bed toward Mrs. Martin. It was quite apparent even to me that she did not share the desire to see Dr. Scott, at least not just then. She was flushed and trembling with emotion. Crossing the room hurriedly she flung open the door into the hall.

"I am sure," she cried, controlling herself with difficulty and catching at a straw, as it were, "that you gentlemen, even if you have saved my father, are no friends of either his or mine. You have merely come here in response to Dr. Burnham, and he came because Jane lost her head in the excitement and forgot that Dr. Scott is now our physician."

"But Dr. Scott could not have been found in time, madame," interposed Dr. Burnham with evident triumph.

She ignored the remark and continued to hold the door open.

"Now leave us," she implored, "you, Dr. Burnham, you, Mr. Prescott, you, Professor Kennedy, and your friend Mr. Jameson, whoever you may be."

She was now cold and calm. In the bewildering change of events we had forgotten the wan figure on the bed still gasping for the breath of life. I could not help wondering at the woman's apparent lack of gratitude, and a thought flashed over my mind. Had the affair come to a contest between various parties fighting by fair means or foul for the old man's money—Scott and Mrs. Martin perhaps against Prescott and Dr. Burnham.

No one moved. We seemed to be waiting on Kennedy. Prescott and Mrs. Martin were now glaring at each other implacably.

The old man moved restlessly on the bed, and over my shoulder I could hear him gasp faintly, "Where's Grace? Send for Grace."

Mrs. Martin paid no attention, seemed not to hear, but stood facing us imperiously as if waiting for us to obey her orders and leave the house. Burnham moved toward the door, but Prescott stood his ground with a peculiar air of defiance. Then he took my arm and started rather precipitately, I thought, to leave.

"Come, come," said somebody behind us, "enough of the dramatics."

It was Kennedy, who had been bending down, listening to the muttering of the old man.

"Look at those eyes of Mr. Haswell," he said. "What color are they?"

We looked. They were blue.

"Down in the parlor," continued Kennedy leisurely, "you will find a portrait of the long deceased Mrs. Haswell. If you will examine that painting you will see that her eyes are also a peculiarly limpid blue. No couple with blue eyes ever had a black-eyed child. At least, if this is such a case, the Carnegie Institution investigators would be glad to hear of it, for it is contrary to all that they have discovered on the subject after years of study of eugenics. Dark-eyed couples may have light-eyed children, but the reverse, never. What do you say to that, madame?"

"You lie," screamed the woman, rushing frantically past us. "I *am* his daughter. No interlopers shall separate us. Father!"

The old man moved feebly away from her.

"Send for Dr. Scott again," she demanded. "See if he cannot be found. He must be found. You are all enemies, villains."

She addressed Kennedy, but included the whole room in her denunciation.

"Not all," broke in Kennedy remorselessly. "Yes, madame, send for Dr. Scott. Why is he not here?"

Prescott, with one hand on my arm and the other on Dr. Burnham's, was moving toward the door.

"One moment, Prescott," interrupted Kennedy, detaining him with a look. "There was something I was about to say when Dr. Burnham's urgent message prevented it. I did not take the trouble even to find out how you obtained that little globule of molten gold from the crucible of alleged copper. There are so many tricks by which the gold could have been 'salted' and brought forth at the right moment that it was hardly worth while. Besides, I had satisfied myself that my first suspicions were correct. See that?"

He held out the little piece of mineral I had already seen in his hand in the alchemist's laboratory.

"That is a piece of willemite. It has the property of glowing or fluorescing under a certain kind of rays which are themselves invisible to the human eye. Prescott, your story of the transmutation of elements is very clever, but not more clever than your real story. Let us piece it together. I had already heard from Dr. Burnham how Mr. Haswell was induced by his desire for gain to visit you and how you had most mysteriously predicted his blindness. Now, there is no such thing as telepathy, at least in this case. How then was I to explain it? What could cause such a catastrophe naturally? Why, only those rays invisible to the human eye, but which make this piece of willemite glow—the ultra-violet rays."

Kennedy was speaking rapidly and was careful not to pause long enough to give Prescott an apportunity to interrupt him.

"These ultra-violet rays," he continued, "are always present in an electric arc light though not to a great degree unless the carbons have metal cores. They extend for two octaves above the violet of the spectrum and are too short to affect the eye as light, although they affect photographic plates. They are the friend of man when he uses them in moderation as Finsen did in the famous blue light treatment. But they tolerate no familiarity. To let them—particularly the shorter of the rays—enter the eye is to invite trouble. There is no warning sense of discomfort, but from six to eighteen hours after exposure to them the victim experiences violent pains in the eyes and headache. Sight may be seriously impaired, and it may take years to recover. Often prolonged exposure results in blindness, though a moderate exposure acts like a tonic. The rays may be compared in this double effect to drugs, such as strychnine. Too much of them may be destructive even to life itself."

Prescott had now paused and was regarding Kennedy contemptuously. Kennedy paid no attention, but continued: "Perhaps these mysterious rays may shed some light on our minds, however. Now, for one thing, ultra-violet light passes readily through quartz, but is cut off by ordinary glass, especially if it is coated with chromium. Old Mr. Haswell did not wear glasses. Therefore he was subject to the rays—the more so as he is a blond, and I think it has been demonstrated by investigators that blonds are more affected by them than are brunettes.

"You have, as a part of your machine, a peculiarly shaped quartz mercury vapor lamp, and the mercury vapor lamp of a design such as that I saw has been invented for the especial purpose of producing ultra-violet rays in large quantity. There are also in your machine induction coils for the purpose of making an impressive noise, and a small electric furnace to heat the salted gold. I don't know what other ingenious fakes you have added. The visible bluish light from the tube is designed, I suppose, to hoodwink the credulous, but the dangerous thing about it is the invisible ray that accompanies that light. Mr. Haswell sat under those invisible rays, Prescott, never knowing how deadly they might be to him, an old man.

"You knew that they would not take effect for hours, and hence you ventured the prediction that he would be stricken at about midnight. Even if it was partial or temporary, still you would be safe in your prophecy. You succeeded better than you hoped in that part of your scheme. You had already prepared the way by means of a letter sent to Mr. Haswell through Dr. Burnham. But Mr. Haswell's credulity and fear worked the wrong way. Instead of appealing to you he hated you. In his predicament he thought only of his banished daughter and turned instinctively to her for help. That made necessary a quick change of plans."

Prescott, far from losing his nerve, turned on us bitterly. "I knew you two were spies the moment I saw you," he shouted. "It seemed as if in some way I knew you for what you were, as if I knew you had seen Mr. Haswell before you came to me. You, too, would have robbed an inventor as I am sure he would. But have a care, both of you. You may be punished also by blindness for your duplicity. Who knows?"

A shudder passed over me at the horrible thought contained in his mocking laugh. Were we doomed to blindness, too? I looked at the sightless man on the bed in alarm.

"I knew that you would know us," retorted Kennedy calmly. "Therefore we came provided with spectacles of Euphos glass, precisely like those you wear. No, Prescott, we are safe, though perhaps we may have some burns like those red blotches on Mr. Haswell, light burns."

Prescott had fallen back a step and Mrs. Martin was making an effort to appear stately and end the interview.

"No," continued Craig, suddenly wheeling, and startling us by the abruptness of his next exposure, "it is you and your wife here—Mrs. Prescott, not Mrs. Martin—who must have a care. Stop glaring at each other. It is no use playing at enemies longer and trying to get rid of us. You overdo it. The game is up."

Prescott made a rush at Kennedy, who seized him by the wrist and held him tightly in a grasp of steel that caused the veins on the back of his hands to stand out like whipcords.

"This is a deep-laid plot," he went on calmly, still holding Prescott, while I backed up against the door and cut off his wife; "but it is not so difficult to see it after all. Your part was to destroy the eyesight of the old man, to make it necessary for him to call on his daughter. Your wife's part was to play the rôle of Mrs. Martin, whom he had not seen for years and could not see now. She was to persuade him, with her filial affection, to make her the beneficiary of his will, to see that his money was kept readily convertible into cash.

"Then, when the old man was at last out of the way, you two could decamp with what you could realize before the real daughter cut off somewhere across the continent could hear of the death of her father. It was an excellent scheme. But Haswell's plain material newspaper advertisement was not so effective for your purposes, Prescott, as the more artistic 'telepagram,' as you call it. Although you two got in first in answering the advertisement, it finally reached the right person after all. You didn't get away quickly enough.

"You were not expecting that the real daughter would see it and turn up so soon. But she has. She lives in California. Mr. Haswell in his delirium has just told of receiving a telegram which I suppose you, Mrs. Prescott, read, destroyed, and acted upon. It hurried your plans, but you were equal to the emergency. Besides, possession is nine points in the law. You tried the gas, making it look like a suicide. Jane, in her excitement, spoiled that, and Dr. Burnham, knowing where I was, as it happened, was able to summon me immediately. Circumstances have been against you from the first, Prescott."

Craig was slowly twisting up the hand of the inventor, which he still held. With his other hand he pulled a paper from his pocket. It was the old envelope on which he had "written upon the occasion of our first visit to Mr. Haswell when we had been so unceremoniously interrupted by the visit of Dr. Scott.

"I sat here yesterday by this bed," continued Craig, motioning toward the chair he had occupied, as I remembered "Mr. Haswell was telling Dr. Scott something in an undertone. I could not hear it. But the old man grasped the doctor by the wrist to pull him closer to whisper to him. The doctor's hand was toward me and I noticed the peculiar markings of the veins.

"You perhaps are not acquainted with the fact, but the markings of the veins in the back of the hand are peculiar to each individual—as infallible, indestructible, and ineffaceable as finger prints or the shape of the ear. It is a system invented and developed by Professor Tamassia of the University of Padua, Italy. A superficial observer would say that all vein patterns were essentially similar, and many have said so, but Tamassia has found each to be characteristic and all subject to almost incredible diversities. There are six general classes—in this case before us, two large veins crossed by a few secondary veins forming a V with its base near the wrist.

"Already my suspicions had been aroused. I sketched the arrangement of the veins standing out on that hand. I noted the same thing just now on the hand that manipulated the fake apparatus in the laboratory. Despite the difference in make-up Scott and Prescott are the same.

"The invisible rays of the ultra-violet light may have blinded Mr. Haswell, even to the recognition of his own daughter, but you can rest assured, Prescott, that the very cleverness of your scheme will penetrate the eyes of the blindfolded goddess of justice. Burnham, if you will have the kindness to summon the police, I will take all the responsibility for the arrest of these people."

The Silent Bullet

BY ARTHUR B. REEVE

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"DETECTIVES in fiction nearly always make a great mistake," said Kennedy one evening after a conversation on crime and science. "They almost invariably antagonize the regular detective force. Now in real life that's impossible—it's fatal."

"Yes," I agreed, looking up from reading an account of the failure of a large Wall Street brokerage house, Kerr Parker & Co., and the peculiar suicide of Kerr Parker. "Yes, it's impossible, just as it is impossible for the regular detectives to antagonize the newspapers. Scotland Yard found that out in the Crippen case."

"My idea of the thing, Jameson," continued Kennedy, "is that the professor of criminal science ought to work with, not against, the regular detectives. They're all right. They're indispensable, of course. Half the secret of success nowadays is organization. The professor of criminal science should be merely what the professor in a technical school often is—a sort of consulting engineer. For instance, I believe that organization plus science would go far toward clearing up that Wall Street case I see you are reading."

I expressed some doubt as to whether the regular police were enlightened enough to take that view of it.

"Some of them are," he replied. "Yesterday the chief of police in a Western city sent a man East to see me about the Price murder—you know the case?

Indeed I did. A wealthy banker of the town had been murdered on the road to the golf club, no one knew why or by whom. Every clue had proved fruitless, and the list of suspects was itself so long and so impossible as to seem most discouraging.

"He sent me a piece of a torn handkerchief with a deep blood-stain on it," pursued Kennedy. "He said it clearly didn't belong to the murdered man, that it indicated that the murderer had himself been wounded in the tussle, but as yet it had proved utterly valueless as a clue. Would I see what I could make of it?

"After his man had told me the story I had a feeling that the murder was committed by either a Sicilian laborer on the links or a negro waiter at the club. Well, to make a short story shorter, I decided to test the blood-stain. Probably you didn't know it, but the Carnegie Institution has just published a minute, careful, and dry study of the blood of human beings and of animals. In fact, they have been able to reclassify the whole animal kingdom on this basis, and have made some most surprising additions to our knowledge of evolution. Now I don't propose to bore you with the details of the tests, but one of the things they showed was that the blood of a certain branch of the human race gives a reaction much like the blood of a certain group of monkeys, the chimpanzees, while the blood of another branch gives a reaction like that of the gorilla. Of course there's lots more to it, but this is all that need concern us now.

"I tried the tests. The blood on the handkerchief conformed strictly to the latter test. Now the gorilla was, of course, out of the question—this was no *Rue Morgue* murder. Therefore it was the negro waiter."

"But," I interrupted, "the negro offered a perfect alibi at the start, and—"

"No buts, Walter. Here's a telegram I received at dinner: 'Congratulations. Confronted Jackson your evidence as wired. Confessed.'"

"Well, Craig, I take off my hat to you," I exclaimed. "Next you'll be solving this Kerr Parker case for sure."

"I would take a hand in it if they'd let me," said he simply.

That night, without saying anything, I sauntered down to the imposing new police building amid the squalor of Center Street. They were very busy at headquarters, but having once had that assignment for the *Star,* I had no trouble in getting in. Inspector Barney O'Connor of the Central Office carefully shifted a cigar from corner to corner of his mouth as I poured forth my suggestion to him.

"Well, Jameson," he said at length, "do you think this professor fellow is the goods?"

I didn't mince matters in my opinion of Kennedy. I told him of the Price case and showed him a copy of the telegram. That settled it.

"Can you bring him down here to-night?" he asked quickly.

I reached for the telephone, found Craig in his laboratory finally, and in less than an hour he was in the office.

"This is a most baffling case, Professor Kennedy, this case of Kerr Parker," said the inspector, launching at once into his subject. "Here is a broker heavily interested in Mexican rubber. It looks like a good thing—plantations right in the same territory as those of the Rubber Trust. Now in addition to that he is branching out into coastwise steamship lines; another man associated with him is heavily engaged in a railway scheme for the United States down into Mexico. Altogether the steamships and railroads are tapping rubber, oil, copper, and I don't know what other regions. Here in New York they have been pyramiding stocks, borrowing money from two trust companies which they control. It's a lovely scheme—you've read about it, I suppose. Also you've read that it comes into competition with a certain group of capitalists whom we will call 'the System.'

"Well, this depression in the market comes along. At once rumors are spread about the weakness of the trust companies; runs start on both of them. The System—you know them—make a great show of supporting the market. Yet the runs continue. God knows whether they will spread or the trust companies stand up under it to-morrow after what happened to-day. It was a good thing the market was closed when it happened.

"Kerr Parker was surrounded by a group of people who were in his schemes with him. They are holding a council of war in the directors' room. Suddenly Parker rises, staggers toward the window, falls, and is dead before a doctor can get to him. Every effort is made to keep the thing quiet. It is given out that he committed suicide. The papers don't seem to accept the suicide theory, however. Neither do we. The coroner, who is working with us, has kept his mouth shut so far, and will say nothing till the inquest. For, Professor Kennedy, my first man on the spot found that—Kerr—Parker—was—murdered.

"Now here comes the amazing part of the story. The doors to the offices on both sides were open at the time. There were lots of people in each office. There was the usual click of typewriters, and the buzz of the ticker, and the hum of conversation. We have any number of witnesses of the whole affair, but as far as any of them knows no shot was fired, no smoke was seen, no noise was heard, nor was any weapon found. Yet here on my desk is a thirty-two calibre bullet. The coroner's physician probed it out of Parker's neck this afternoon and turned it over to us."

Kennedy reached for the bullet, and turned it thoughtfully in his fingers for a moment. One side of it had apparently struck a bone in the neck of the murdered man, and was flattened. The other side was still perfectly smooth. With his inevitable magnifying-glass he scrutinized the bullet on every side. I watched his face anxiously, and I could see that he was very intent and very excited.

"Extraordinary, most extraordinary," he said to himself as he turned it over and over. "Where did you say this bullet struck?"

"In the fleshy part of the neck, quite a little back of and below his ear and just above his collar. There wasn't much bleeding. I think it must have struck the base of his brain."

"It didn't strike his collar or hair?"

"No," replied the inspector.

"Inspector, I think we shall be able to put our hand on the murderer—I think we can get a conviction, sir, on the evidence that I shall get from this bullet in my laboratory."

"That's pretty much like a story-book," drawled the inspector incredulously, shaking his head.

"Perhaps," smiled Kennedy. "But there will still be plenty of work for the police to do, too. I've only got a clue to the murderer. It will tax the whole organization to follow it up, believe me. Now, Inspector, can you spare the time to go down to Parker's office and take me over the ground? No doubt we can develop something else there."

"Sure," answered O'Connor, and within five minutes we were hurrying down town in one of the department automobiles.

We found the office under guard of one of the Central Office men, while in the outside office Parker's confidential clerk and a few assistants were still at work in a subdued and awed manner. Men were working in many other Wall Street offices that night during the panic, but in none was there more reason for it than here. Later I learned that it was the quiet tenacity of this confidential clerk that saved even as much of Parker's estate as was saved for his widow—little enough it was, too. What he saved for the clients of the firm no one will ever know. Somehow or other I liked John Downey, the clerk, from the moment I was introduced to him. He seemed to me, at least, to be the typical confidential clerk who would carry a secret worth millions and keep it.

The officer in charge touched his hat to the inspector, and Downey hastened to put himself at our service. It was plain that the murder had completely mystified him, and that he was as anxious as we were to get at the bottom of it.

"Mr. Downey," began Kennedy, "I understand you were present when this sad event took place."

"Yes, sir, sitting right here at the directors' table," he replied, taking a chair, "like this."

"Now can you recollect just how Mr. Parker acted when he was shot? Could you—er—could you take his place and show us just how it happened?"

"Yes, sir," said Downey. "He was sitting here at the head of the table. Mr. Bruce, who is the 'Co.' of the firm, had been sitting here at his right; I was at the left. The inspector has a list of all the others present. That door to the right was open, and Mrs. Parker and some other ladies were in the room—"

"Mrs. Parker?" broke in Kennedy.

"Yes. Like a good many brokerage firms we have a ladies' room. Many ladies are among our clients. We make a point of catering to them. At that time I recollect the door was open—all the doors were open. It was not a secret meeting.

Mr. Bruce had just gone into the ladies' department, I think to ask some of them to stand by the firm—he was an artist at smoothing over the fears of customers, particularly women. Just before he went in I had seen the ladies go in a group toward the far end of the room—to look down at the line of depositors on the street, which reached around the corner from one of the trust companies, I thought. I was making a note of an order to send into the outside office there on the left, and had just pushed this button here under the table to call a boy to carry it. Mr. Parker had just received a letter by special delivery, and seemed considerably puzzled over it. No, I don't know what it was about. Of a sudden I saw him start in his chair, rise up unsteadily, clap his hand on the back of his head, stagger across the floor—like this—and fall here."

"Then what happened?"

"Why, I rushed to pick him up. Everything was confusion. I recall someone behind me saying, 'Here, boy, take all these papers off the table and carry them into my office before they get lost in the excitement.' I think it was Bruce's voice. The next moment I heard someone say, 'Stand back, Mrs. Parker has fainted.' But I didn't pay much attention, for I was calling to someone not to get a doctor over the telephone, but to go down to the fifth floor where one has an office. I made Mr. Parker as comfortable as I could. There wasn't much I could do. He seemed to want to say something to me, but he couldn't talk. He was paralyzed, at least his throat was. But I did manage to make out finally what sounded to me like, 'Tell her I don't believe the scandal, I don't believe it.' But before he could say whom to tell he had again become unconscious, and by the time the doctor arrived he was dead. I guess you know everything else as well as I do."

"You didn't hear the shot fired from any particular direction?" asked Kennedy.

"No, sir."

"Well, where do you think it came from?"

"That's what puzzles me, sir. The only thing I can figure out is that it was fired from the outside office—perhaps by some customer who had lost money and sought revenge. But no one out there heard it either, any more than they did in the directors' room or the ladies' department."

"About that message," asked Kennedy, ignoring what to me seemed to be the most important feature of the case, the mystery of the silent bullet. "Didn't you see it after all was over?"

"No, sir; in fact I had forgotten about it till this moment when you asked me to reconstruct the circumstances exactly. No, sir, I don't know a thing about it. I can't say it impressed itself on my mind at the time, either."

"What did Mrs. Parker do when she came to?"

"Oh, she cried as I have never seen a woman cry before. He was dead by that time, of course. Mr. Bruce and I saw her down in the elevator to her car. In fact, the doctor, who had arrived, said that the sooner she was taken home the better she would be. She was quite hysterical."

"Did she say anything that you remember?"

Downey hesitated.

"Out with it, Downey," said the inspector. "What did she say as she was going down in the elevator?"

"Nothing."

"Tell us. I'll arrest you if you don't."

"Nothing about the murder, on my honor," protested Downey.

Kennedy leaned over suddenly and shot a remark at him, "Then it was about the note."

Downey was surprised, but not quickly enough. Still he seemed to be considering something, and in a moment he said:

"I don't know what it was about, but I feel it is my duty, after all, to tell you. I heard her say, 'I wonder if he knew.'"

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

"What happened after you came back?"

"We entered the ladies' department. No one was there. A woman's automobile-coat was thrown over a chair in a heap. Mr. Bruce picked it up. 'It's Mrs. Parker's,' he said. He wrapped it up hastily, and rang for a messenger."

"Where did he send it?"

"To Mrs. Parker, I suppose. I didn't hear the address."

We next went over the whole suite of offices, conducted by Mr. Downey. I noted how carefully Kennedy looked into the directors' room through the open door from the ladies' department. He stood at such an angle that had he been the assassin he could scarcely have been seen except by those sitting immediately next Mr. Parker at the directors' table. The street windows were directly in front of him, and back of him was the chair on which the motor-coat had been found.

In Parker's own office we spent some time, as well as in Bruce's. Kennedy made a search for the note, but finding nothing in either office, turned out the contents of Bruce's scrap-basket. There didn't seem to be anything in it to interest him, however, even after he had pieced several torn bits of scraps together with much difficulty, and he was about to turn the papers back again, when he noticed something sticking to the side of the basket. It looked like a mass of wet paper, and that was precisely what it was.

"That's queer," said Kennedy, picking it loose. Then he wrapped it up carefully and put it in his pocket. "Inspector, can you lend me one of your men for a couple of days?" he asked, as we were preparing to leave. "I shall want to send him out of town to-night, and shall probably need his services when he gets back."

"Very well. Riley will be just the fellow. We'll go back to headquarters, and I'll put him under your orders."

It was not until late in the following day that I saw Kennedy again. It had been a busy day on the *Star*. We had gone to work that morning expecting to see the financial heavens fall. But just about five minutes to ten, before the Stock Exchange opened, the news came in over the wire from our financial man on Broad Street: "The System has forced James Bruce, partner of Kerr Parker, the dead banker, to sell his railroad, steamship, and rubber holdings to it. On this condition it promises unlimited support to the market."

"Forced!" muttered the managing editor, as he waited on the office 'phone to get the composing-room, so as to hurry up the few lines in red ink on the first page and beat our rivals on the streets with the first extras. "Why, he's been working to bring that about for the past two weeks. What that System doesn't control isn't worth having—it edits the news before our men get it, and as for grist for the divorce courts, and tragedies, well—Hello, Jenkins, yes, a special extra. Change the big heads—copy is on the way up—rush it."

"So you think this Parker case is a mess?" I asked.

"I know it. That's a pretty swift bunch of females that have been speculating at Kerr Parker & Co.'s. I understand there's one Titian-haired young lady—who, by the way, has at least one husband who hasn't yet been divorced—who is a sort of ringleader, though she rarely goes personally to her brokers' office. She's one of those uptown plungers, and the story is that she has a whole string of scalps of alleged Sunday-school superintendents at her belt. She can make Bruce do pretty nearly anything, they say. He's the latest conquest. I got the story on pretty good authority, but until I verified the names, dates and places, of course I wouldn't dare print a line of it. The story goes that her husband is a hanger-on of the System, and that she's been working in their interest, too. That was why he was so complacent over the whole affair. They put her up to capturing Bruce, and after she had acquired an influence over him they worked it so that she made him make love to Mrs. Parker. It's a long story, but that isn't all of it. The point was, you see, that by this devious route they hoped to worm out of Mrs. Parker some inside information about Parker's rubber schemes, which he hadn't divulged even to his partners in business. It was a deep and carefully planned plot, and some of the conspirators were pretty deeply in the mire, I guess. I wish I'd had all the facts about who this red-haired Machiavelli was—what a piece of muckraking it would have made! Oh, here comes the rest of the news story over the wire. By Jove, it is said on good authority that Bruce will be taken in as one of the board of directors. What do you think of that?"

So that was how the wind lay—Bruce making love to Mrs. Parker and she presumably betraying her husband's secrets. I thought I saw it all: the note from somebody exposing the scheme, Parker's incredulity, Bruce sitting by him and catching sight of the note, his hurrying out into the ladies' department, and then the shot. But who fired it? After all, I had only picked up another clue.

Kennedy was not at the apartment at dinner, and an inquiry at the laboratory was fruitless also. So I sat down to fidget for a while. Pretty soon the buzzer on the door sounded, and I opened it to find a messenger-boy with a large brown paper parcel.

"Is Mr. Bruce here?" he asked.

"Why, no, he doesn't—" then I checked myself and added: "He will be here presently. You can leave the bundle."

"Well, this is the parcel he telephoned for. His valet told me to tell him that they had a hard time to find, it but he guesses it's all right. The charges are forty cents. Sign here."

I signed the book, feeling like a thief, and the boy departed. What it all meant I could not guess.

Just then I heard a key in the lock, and Kennedy came in.

"Is your name Bruce?" I asked.

"Why?" he replied eagerly. "Has anything come?"

I pointed to the package. Kennedy made a dive for it and unwrapped it. It was a woman's pongee automobile-coat. He held it up to the light. The pocket on the right-hand side was scorched and burned, and a hole was torn clean through it. I gasped when the full significance of it dawned on me.

"How did you get it?" I exclaimed at last in surprise.

"That's where organization comes in," said Kennedy. "The police at my request went over every messenger call from Parker's office that afternoon, and traced every one of them up. At last they found one that led to Bruce's apartment. None of them led to Mrs. Parker's home. The rest were all business calls and satisfactorily accounted for. I reasoned that this was the one that involved the disappearance of the automobile-coat. It was a chance worth taking, so I got Downey to call up Bruce's valet. The valet of course recognized Downey's voice and suspected nothing. Downey assumed to know all about the coat in the package received yesterday. He asked to have it sent up here. I see the scheme worked."

"But, Kennedy, do you think she—" I stopped, speechless, looking at the scorched coat.

"Nothing to say—yet," he replied laconically. "But if you could tell me anything about that note Parker received I'd thank you."

I related what our managing editor had said that morning. Kennedy only raised his eyebrows a fraction of an inch.

"I had guessed something of that sort," he said merely. "I'm glad to find it confirmed even by hearsay evidence. This red-haired young lady interests me. Not a very definite description, but better than nothing at all. I wonder who she is. Ah, well, what do you say to a stroll down the White Way before I go to my laboratory? I'd like a breath of air to relax my mind."

We had got no further than the first theatre when Kennedy slapped me on the back. "By George, Jameson, she's an actress, of course."

"Who is? What's the matter with you, Kennedy? Are you crazy?"

"The red-haired person—she must be an actress. Don't you remember the auburn-haired leading lady in the 'Follies'—the girl who sings that song about 'Mary, Mary, quite contrary'? Her stage name, you know, is Phœbe La Neige. Well, if it's she who is concerned in this case I don't think she'll be playing to-night. Let's inquire at the box-office."

She wasn't playing, but just what it had to do with anything in particular I couldn't see, and I said as much.

"Why, Walter, you'd never do as a detective. You lack intuition. Sometimes I think I haven't quite enough of it, either. Why didn't I think of that sooner? Don't you know she is the wife of Adolphus Hesse, the most inveterate gambler in stocks in the System? Why, I had only to put two and two together and the whole thing flashed on me in an instant. Isn't it a good hypothesis that she is the red-haired woman in the case, the tool of the System in which her husband is so heavily involved? I'll have to add her to my list of suspects."

"Why, you don't think she did the shooting?" I asked, half hoping, I must admit, for an assenting nod from him.

"Well," he answered dryly, "one shouldn't let any preconceived hypothesis stand between him and the truth. I've made a guess at the whole thing already. It may or it may not be right. Anyhow she will fit into it. And if it's not right, I've got to be prepared to make a new guess, that's all."

When we reached the laboratory on our return, the inspector's man Riley was there, waiting impatiently for Kennedy.

"What luck?" asked Kennedy.

"I've got a list of purchasers of that kind of revolver," he said. "We have been to every sporting-goods and arms-store in the city which bought them from the factory, and I could lay my hands on pretty nearly every one of the weapons in twenty-four hours—provided, of course, they haven't been secreted or destroyed."

"Pretty nearly all isn't good enough," said Kennedy. "It will have to be all, unless—"

"*That* name is in the list," whispered Riley hoarsely.

"Oh, then it's all right," answered Kennedy, brightening up. "Riley, I will say that you're a wonder at using the organization in ferreting out such things. There's just one more thing I want you to do. I want a sample of the notepaper in the private desks of every one of these people." He handed the policeman a list of his "suspects," as he called them. It included nearly every one mentioned in the case.

Riley studied it dubiously and scratched his chin thoughtfully. "That's a hard one, Mr. Kennedy, sir. You see, it means getting into so many different houses and apartments. Now you don't want to do it by means of a warrant, do you, sir? Of course not. Well, then, how can we get in?"

"You're a pretty good-looking chap yourself, Riley," said Kennedy. "I should think you could jolly a housemaid, if necessary. Anyhow, you can get the fellow on the beat to do it—if he isn't already to be found in the kitchen. Why, I see a dozen ways of getting the notepaper."

"Oh, it's me that's the lady-killer, sir," grinned Riley. "I'm a regular Blarney stone when I'm out on a job of that sort. Sure, I'll have some of them for you in the morning."

"Bring me what you get, the first thing in the morning, even if you've landed only a few samples," said Kennedy, as

Riley departed, straightening his tie and brushing his hat on his sleeve.

"And now, Walter, you too must excuse me to-night," said Craig. "I've got a lot to do, and sha'n't be up to our apartment till very late—or early. But I feel sure I've got a strangle-hold on this mystery. If I get those papers from Riley in good time to-morrow I shall invite you and several others to a grand demonstration here to-morrow night. Don't forget. Keep the whole evening free. It will be a big story."

Kennedy's laboratory was brightly lighted when I arrived early the next evening. One by one his "guests" dropped in. It was evident that they had little liking for the visit, but the coroner had sent out the "invitations," and they had nothing to do but accept. Each one was politely welcomed by the professor and assigned a seat, much as he would have done with a group of students. The inspector and the coroner sat back a little. Mrs. Parker, Mr. Downey, Mr. Bruce, myself, and Miss La Neige sat in that order in the very narrow and uncomfortable little armchairs used by the students during lectures.

At last Kennedy was ready to begin. He took his position behind the long, flat-topped table which he used for his demonstrations before his classes. "I realize, ladies and gentlemen," he began formally, "that I am about to do a very unusual thing; but, as you all know, the police and the coroner have been completely baffled by this terrible mystery and have requested me to attempt to clear up at least certain points in it. I will begin what I have to say by remarking that the tracing out of a crime like this differs in nothing, except as regards the subject-matter, from the search for a scientific truth. The forcing of man's secrets is like the forcing of nature's secrets. Both are pieces of detective work. The methods employed in the detection of crime are, or rather should be, like the methods employed in the process of discovering scientific truth. In a crime of this sort, two kinds of evidence need to be secured. Circumstantial evidence must first be marshalled, and then a motive must be found. I have been gathering facts. But to omit motives and rest contented with mere facts would be inconclusive. It would never convince anybody or convict anybody. In other words, circumstantial evidence must first lead to a suspect, and then this suspect must prove equal to accounting for the facts. It is my hope that each of you may contribute something that will be of service in arriving at the truth of this unfortunate incident."

The tension was not relieved even when Kennedy stopped speaking and began to fuss with a little upright target which he set up at one end of his table. We seemed to be seated over a powder-magazine which threatened to explode at any moment. I, at least, felt the tension so greatly that it was only after he had started speaking again that I noticed that the target was composed of a thick layer of some putty-like material.

Holding a thirty-two-calibre pistol in his right hand and aiming it at the target, Kennedy picked up a large piece of coarse homespun from the table and held it loosely over the muzzle of the gun. Then he fired. The bullet tore through the cloth, sped through the air, and buried itself in the target. With a knife he pried it out.

"I doubt if even the inspector himself could have told us that when an ordinary leaden bullet is shot through a woven fabric the weave of the fabric is in the majority of cases impressed on the bullet, sometimes clearly, sometimes faintly."

Here Kennedy took up a piece of fine batiste and fired another bullet through it.

"Every leaden bullet, as I have said, which has struck such a fabric bears an impression of the threads which is recognizable even when the bullet has penetrated deeply into the body. It is only obliterated partially or entirely when the bullet has been flattened by striking a bone or other hard object. Even then, as in this case, if only a part of the bullet is flattened the remainder may still show the marks of the fabric. A heavy warp, say of cotton velvet, or as I have here, homespun, will be imprinted well on the bullet, but even a fine batiste, containing one hundred threads to the inch, will show marks. Even layers of goods such as a coat, shirt, and undershirt may each leave their marks, but that does not concern us in this case. Now I have here a piece of pongee silk, cut from a woman's automobile-coat. I discharge the bullet through it—so. I compare the bullet now with the others and with the one probed from the neck of Mr. Parker. I find that the marks on that fatal bullet correspond precisely with those on the bullet fired through the pongee coat."

Startling as was this revelation, Kennedy paused only an instant before the next.

"Now I have another demonstration. A certain note figures in this case. Mr. Parker was reading it, or perhaps re-reading it, at the time he was shot. I have not been able to obtain that note—at least not in a form such as I could use in discovering what were its contents. But in a certain wastebasket I found a mass of wet and pulp-like paper. It had been cut up, macerated, perhaps chewed; perhaps it had been also soaked with water. There was a wash-basin with running water in this room. The ink had run, and of course was illegible. The thing was so unusual that I at once assumed that this was the remains of the note in question. Under ordinary circumstances it would be utterly valueless as a clue to anything. But to-day science is not ready to let anything pass as valueless.

"I found on microscopic examination that it was an uncommon linen bond paper, and I have taken a large number of microphotographs of the fibres in it. They are all similar. I have here also about a hundred microphotographs of the fibres in other kinds of paper, many of them bonds. These I have accumulated from time to time in my study of the subject. None of them, as you see, shows fibres resembling this one in question, so we may conclude that it is of uncommon quality. Through an agent of the police I have secured samples of the notepaper of every one who could be concerned, as far as I could see, with this case. Here are the photographs of the fibres of these various notepapers, and among them all is just one that corresponds to the fibres in the wet mass of paper I discovered in the scrap-basket. Now lest anyone should question the accuracy of this method I might cite a case where a man had been arrested in Germany charged with stealing a government bond. He was not searched till later. There was no evidence save that after the arrest a large number of spitballs were found around the courtyard under his cell window. This method of comparing the fibres with those of the regular government paper was used, and by it the man was convicted of stealing the bond. I think it is almost unnecessary to add that in the present case we know precisely who—"

At this point the tension was so great that it snapped. Miss La Neige, who was sitting beside me, had been leaning forward involuntarily. Almost as if the words were wrung from her she whispered hoarsely: "They put me up to doing it; I didn't want to. But the affair had gone too far. I couldn't see him lost before my very eyes. I didn't want her to get him. The quickest way out was to tell the whole story to Mr. Parker and stop it. It was the only way I could think to stop this thing between another man's wife and the man I loved better than my own husband. God knows, Professor Kennedy, that was all—"

"Calm yourself, madame," interrupted Kennedy soothingly. "Calm yourself. What's done is done. The truth must come out. Be calm. Now," he continued, after the first storm of remorse had spent itself and we were all outwardly composed again, "we have said nothing whatever of the most mysterious feature of the case, the firing of the shot. The murderer could have thrust the weapon into the pocket or the folds of this coat"—here he drew forth the automobile coat and held it aloft, displaying the bullet hole—"and he or she (I will not say which) could have discharged the pistol unseen. By removing and secreting the weapon afterward one very important piece of evidence would be suppressed. This person could have used such a cartridge as I have here, made with smokeless powder, and the coat would have concealed the flash of the shot very effectively. There would have been no smoke. But neither this coat nor even a heavy blanket would have deadened the report of the shot.

"What are we to think of that? Only one thing. I have often wondered why the thing wasn't done before. In fact I have been waiting for it to occur. There is an invention that makes it almost possible to strike a man down with impunity in broad daylight in any place where there is sufficient noise to cover up a click, a slight 'Pouf!' and the whir of the bullet in the air.

"I refer to this little device of a Hartford inventor. I place it over the muzzle of the thirty-two-calibre revolver I have so far been using—so. Now, Mr. Jameson, if you will sit at that typewriter over there and write—anything so long as you keep the keys clicking. The inspector will start that imitation stock-ticker in the corner. Now we are ready. I cover the pistol with a cloth. I defy anyone in this room to tell me the exact moment when I discharged the pistol. I could have shot any of you, and an outsider not in the secret would never have thought that I was the culprit. To a certain extent I have reproduced the conditions under which this shooting occurred.

"At once on being sure of this feature of the case I despatched a man to Hartford to see this inventor. The man obtained from him a complete list of all the dealers in New York to whom such devices had been sold. The man also traced every sale of those dealers. He did not actually obtain the weapon, but if he is working on schedule-time according to agreement he is at this moment armed with a search-warrant and is ransacking every possible place where the person suspected of this crime could have concealed his weapon. For, one of the persons intimately connected with this case purchased not long ago a silencer for a thirty-two-calibre revolver, and I presume that that person carried the gun and the silencer at the time of the murder of Kerr Parker."

Kennedy concluded in triumph, his voice high pitched, his eyes flashing. Yet to all outward appearance not a heart-beat was quickened. Someone in that room had an amazing store of self-possession. The fear flitted across my mind that even at the last Kennedy was baffled.

"I had anticipated some such anti-climax," he continued after a moment. "I am prepared for it."

He touched a bell, and the door to the next room opened. One of Kennedy's graduate students stepped in.

"You have the records, Whiting?" he asked.

"Yes, Professor."

"I may say," said Kennedy, "that each of your chairs is wired under the arm in such a way as to betray on an appropriate indicator in the next room every sudden and undue emotion. Though it may be concealed from the eye. even of one like me who stand facing you, such emotion is nevertheless expressed by physical pressure on the arms of the chair. It is a test that is used frequently with students to demonstrate various points of psychology. You needn't raise your arms from the chair, ladies and gentlemen. The tests are *all over* now. What did they show, Whiting?"

The student read what he had been noting in the next room. At the production of the coat during the demonstration of the markings of the bullet, Mrs. Parker had betrayed great emotion, Mr. Bruce had done likewise, and nothing more than ordinary emotion had been noted for the rest of us. Miss La Neige's automatic record during the tracing out of the sending of the note to Parker had been especially unfavorable to hear; Mr. Bruce showed almost as much excitement; Mrs. Parker very little and Downey very little. It was all set forth in curves drawn by self-recording pens on regular ruled paper. The student had merely noted what took place in the lecture-room as corresponding to these curves.

"At the mention of the noiseless gun," said Kennedy, bending over the record, while the student pointed it out to him and we leaned forward to catch his words, "I find that the curves of Miss La Neige, Mrs. Parker, and Mr. Downey are only so far from normal as would be natural. All of them were witnessing a thing for the first time with only curiosity and no fear. The curve made by Mr. Bruce shows great agitation and—"

I heard a metallic click at my side and turned hastily. It was Inspector Barney O'Connor, who had stepped out of the shadow with a pair of hand-cuffs.

"James Bruce, you are under arrest," he said.

There flashed on my mind, and I think on the minds of some of the others a picture of another electrically wired chair.

The Deadly Tube

BY ARTHUR B. REEVE

The Deadly Tube

BY ARTHUR B. REEVE

"FOR Heaven's sake, Gregory, what is the matter?" asked Craig Kennedy as a tall, nervous man stalked into our apartment one evening. "Jameson, shake hands with Dr. Gregory. What's the matter, Doctor? Surely your X-ray work hasn't knocked you out like this?"

The doctor shook hands with me mechanically. His hand was icy. "The blow has fallen," he exclaimed, as he sank limply into a chair and tossed an evening paper over to Kennedy.

In red ink on the first page, in the little square headed "Latest News," Kennedy read the caption, "Society Woman Crippled for Life by X-Ray Treatment."

"A terrible tragedy was revealed in the suit begun to-day," continued the article, "by Mrs. Huntington Close against Dr. James Gregory, an X-ray specialist with offices at—— Madison Avenue, to recover damages for injuries which Mrs. Close alleges she received while under his care. Several months ago she began a course of X-ray treatment to remove a birthmark on her neck. In her complaint Mrs. Close alleges that Dr. Gregory has carelessly caused X-ray dermatitis, a skin disease of cancerous nature, and that she has also been rendered a nervous wreck through the effects of the rays. Simultaneously with filing the suit she left home and entered a private hospital. Mrs. Close is one of the most popular hostesses in the smart set, and her loss will be keenly felt."

"What am I to do, Kennedy?" asked the doctor imploringly. "You remember I told you the other day about this case—that there was something queer about it, that after a few treatments I was afraid to carry on any more and refused to do so? She really has dermatitis and nervous prostration, exactly as she alleges in her complaint. But, before Heaven, Kennedy, I can't see how she could possibly have been so affected by the few treatments I gave her. And to-night just as I was leaving the office, I received a telephone call from her husband's attorney, Lawrence, very kindly informing me that the case would be pushed to the limit. I tell you, it looks black for me."

"What can they do?"

"Do? Do you suppose any jury is going to take enough expert testimony to outweigh the tragedy of a beautiful woman? Do? Why, they can ruin me, even if I get a verdict of acquittal. They can leave me with a reputation for carelessness that no mere court decision can ever overcome."

"Gregory, you can rely on me," said Kennedy. "Anything I can do to help you I will gladly do. Jameson and I were on the point of going out to dinner. Join us, and after that we will go down to your office and talk things over."

"You are really too kind," murmured the doctor. The air of relief that was written on his face was pathetically eloquent.

"Now not a word about the case till we have had dinner," commanded Craig. "I see very plainly that you have been worrying about the blow for a long time. Well, it has fallen. The next thing to do is to look over the situation and see where we stand."

Dinner over, we rode down-town in the subway, and Gregory ushered us into an office-building on Madison Avenue, where he had a very handsome suite of several rooms. We sat down in his waiting-room to discuss the affair.

"It is indeed a very tragic case," began Kennedy, "almost more tragic than if the victim had been killed outright. Mrs. Huntington Close is or rather I suppose I should say was—one of the famous beauties of the city. From what the paper says, her beauty has been hopelessly ruined by this dermatitis, which, I understand, Doctor, is practically incurable."

Dr. Gregory nodded, and I could not help following his eyes as he looked at his own rough and scarred hands.

"Also," continued Craig, with his eyes half closed and his finger-tips together, as if he were taking a mental inventory of the facts in the case, "her nerves are so shattered that she will be years in recovering, if she ever recovers."

"Yes," said the doctor simply. "I myself, for instance, am subject to the most unexpected attacks of neuritis. But, of course, I am under the influence of the rays fifty or sixty times a day, while she had only a few treatments at intervals of many days."

"Now, on the other hand," resumed Craig, "I know you, Gregory, very well. Only the other day, before any of this came out, you told me the whole story with your fears as to the outcome. I know that the lawyer of Close's has been keeping this thing hanging over your head for a long time. And I also know that you are one of the most careful X-ray operators in the city. If this suit goes against you, one of the most brilliant men of science in America will be ruined. Now, having said this much, let me ask you to describe just exactly what treatments you gave Mrs. Close."

The doctor led us into his X-ray room adjoining. A number of X-ray tubes were neatly put away in a great glass case, and at one end of the room was an operating-table with an X-ray apparatus suspended over it. A glance at the room showed that Kennedy's praise was not exaggerated.

"How many treatments did you give Mrs. Close?" asked Kennedy.

"Not over a dozen, I should say," replied Gregory. "I have a record of them and the dates, which I will give you presently. Certainly they were not numerous enough or frequent enough to have caused a dermatitis such as she has. Besides, look here. I have an apparatus which, for safety to the patient, has few equals in the country. This big lead-glass bowl, which is placed over my X-ray tube when in use, cuts off the rays at every point except exactly where they are needed."

He switched on the electric current, and the apparatus began to sputter. The pungent odor of ozone from the electric discharge filled the room. Through the lead-glass bowl I could see the X-ray tube inside suffused with its peculiar, yellowish-green light, divided into two hemispheres of different shades. That, I knew, was the cathode ray, not the X-ray, for the X-ray itself, which streams outside the tube, is invisible to the human eye. The doctor placed in our hands a couple of fluoroscopes, an apparatus by which X-rays can be detected. It consists simply of a closed box with an opening to which the eyes are placed. The opposite end of the box is a piece of board coated with a salt such as platino-barium cyanide. When the X-ray strikes this salt it makes it glow, or fluoresce, and objects held between the X-ray tube and the fluoroscope cast shadows according to the density of the parts which the X-rays penetrate.

With the lead-glass bowl removed, the X-ray tube sent forth its wonderful invisible radiation and made the back of the fluoroscope glow with light. I could see the bones of my fingers as I held them up between the X-ray tube and the fluoroscope. But with the lead-glass bowl in position over the tube, the fluoroscope was simply a black box into which I looked and saw nothing. So very little of the radiation escaped from the bowl that it was negligible—except at one point where there was an opening in the bottom of the bowl to allow the rays to pass freely through exactly on the spot on the patient where they were to be used.

"The dermatitis, they say, has appeared all over her body, particularly on her head and shoulders," added Dr. Gregory. "Now I have shown you my apparatus to impress on you how really impossible it would have been for her to contract it from her treatments here. I've made thousands of exposures with never an X-ray burn before—except to myself. As for myself, I'm as careful as I can be, but you can see I am under the rays very often, while the patient is only under them once in a while."

To illustrate his care he pointed out to us a cabinet directly back of the operating-table, lined with thick sheets of lead. From this cabinet he conducted most of his treatments as far as possible. A little peep-hole enabled him to see the patient and the X-ray apparatus, while an arrangement of mirrors and a fluorescent screen enabled him to see exactly what the X-rays were disclosing, without his leaving the lead-lined cabinet.

"I can think of no more perfect protection for either patient or operator," said Kennedy admiringly. "By the way, did Mrs. Close come alone?"

"No, the first time Mr. Close came with her. After that, she came with her French maid."

The next day we paid a visit to Mrs. Close herself at the private hospital. Kennedy had been casting about in his mind for an excuse to see her, and I had suggested that we go as reporters from the *Star*. Fortunately after sending up my card on which I had written Craig's name we were at length allowed to go up to her room.

We found the patient reclining in an easy chair, swathed in bandages, a wreck of her former self. I felt the tragedy keenly. All that social position and beauty had meant to her had been suddenly blasted.

"You will pardon my presumption," began Craig, "but, Mrs. Close, I assure you that I am actuated by the best of motives. We represent the New York *Star*—"

"Isn't it terrible enough that I should suffer so," she interrupted, "but must the newspapers hound me, too?"

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Close," said Craig, "but you must be aware that the news of your suit of Dr. Gregory has now become public property. I couldn't stop the *Star*, much less the other papers, from talking about it. But I can and will do this, Mrs. Close. I will see that justice is done to you and all others concerned. Believe me, I am not here as a yellow journalist to make newspaper copy out of your misfortune. I am here to get at the truth sympathetically. Incidentally, I may be able to render you a service, too."

"You can render me no service except to expedite the suit against that careless doctor—I hate him."

"Perhaps," said Craig. "But suppose someone else should be proved to have been really responsible? Would you still want to press the suit and let the guilty person escape?"

She bit her lip. "What is it you want of me?" she asked.

"I merely want permission to visit your rooms at your home and to talk with your maid. I do not mean to spy on you, far from it; but consider, Mrs. Close, if I should be able to get at the bottom of this thing, find out the real cause of your misfortune, perhaps show that you are the victim of a cruel wrong rather than of carelessness, would you not be willing to let me go ahead? I am frank to tell you that I suspect there is more to this affair than you yourself have any idea of."

"No, you are mistaken, Mr. Kennedy. I know the cause of it. It was my love of beauty. I couldn't resist the temptation to get rid of even a slight defect. If I had left well enough alone I should not be here now. A friend recommended Dr. Gregory to my husband, who took me there. My husband wishes me to remain at home, but I tell him I feel more comfortable here in the hospital. I shall never go to that house again—the memory of the torture of sleepless nights in my room there when I felt my good looks going, going"—she shuddered—"is such that I can never forget it. He says I would be better off there, but no, I cannot go. Still," she continued wearily, "there can be no harm in your talking to my maid."

Kennedy noted attentively what she was saying. "I thank you, Mrs. Close," he replied. "I am sure you will not regret your permission. Would you be so kind as to give me a note to her?"

She rang, dictated a short note to a nurse, signed it, and languidly dismissed us.

I don't know that I ever felt as depressed as I did after that interview with one who had entered a living death to ambition, for while Craig had done all the talking I had absorbed nothing but depression. I vowed that if Gregory or anybody else was responsible I would do my share toward bringing on him retribution.

The Closes lived in a splendid big house in the Murray Hill section. The presentation of the note quickly brought Mrs. Close's maid down to us. She had not gone to the hospital because Mrs. Close had considered the services of the trained nurses quite sufficient.

Yes, the maid had noticed how her mistress had been failing, had noticed it long ago, in fact almost at the time when she had begun the X-ray treatment. She had seemed to improve once when she went away for a few days, but that was at the start, and directly after her return she grew worse again, until she was no longer herself.

"Did Dr. Gregory, the X-ray specialist, ever attend Mrs. Close at her home, in her room?" asked Craig.

"Yes, once, twice, he call, but he do no good," she said with her French accent.

"Did Mrs. Close have other callers?"

"But, m'sieur, everyone in society has many. What does m'sieur mean?"

"Frequent callers—a Mr. Lawrence, for instance?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Lawrence frequently."

"When Mr. Close was at home?"

"Yes, on business and on business, too, when he was not at home. He is the attorney, m'sieur."

"How did Mrs. Close receive him?"

"He is the attorney, m'sieur," Marie repeated persistently.

"And he, did he always call on business?"

"Oh, yes, always on business, but—well, madame, she was a very beautiful woman. Perhaps he like beautiful women—*eh bien?* That was before the Doctor Gregory treated madame. After the doctor treated madame M'sieur Lawrence do not call so often. That's all."

"Are you thoroughly devoted to Mrs. Close? Would you do a favor for her?" asked Craig pointblank.

"Sir, I would give my life, almost, for madame. She was always so good to me."

"I don't ask you to give your life for her, Marie," said Craig, "but you can do her a great service, a very great service."

"I will do it."

"To-night," said Craig. "I want you to sleep in Mrs. Close's room. You can do so, for I know that Mr. Close is living at the St. Francis Club until his wife returns from the sanitarium. To-morrow morning come to my laboratory" —Craig handed her his card—"and I will tell you what to do next. By the way, don't say anything to anyone in the house about it, and keep a sharp watch on the actions of any of the servants who may go into Mrs. Close's room."

"Well," said Craig, "there is nothing more to be done immediately." We had once more regained the street and were walking up-town. We walked in silence for several blocks.

"Yes," mused Craig, "there is something you can do, after all, Walter. I would like you to look up Gregory and Close and Lawrence. I already know something about them. But you can find out a good deal with your newspaper connections. I would like to have every bit of scandal that has ever been connected with them, or with Mrs. Close, or," he added significantly, "with any other woman. It isn't necessary to say that not a breath of it must be published—yet."

I found a good deal of gossip, but very little of it, indeed, seemed to me at the time to be of importance. Dropping in at the St. Francis Club, where I had some friends, I casually mentioned the troubles of the Huntington Closes. I was surprised to learn that Close spent little of his time at the Club, none at home, and only dropped into the hospital to make formal inquiries as to his wife's condition. It then occurred to me to drop into the office of *Society Squibs,* whose editor I had long known. The editor told me, with that nameless look of the cynical scandalmonger, that if I wanted to learn anything about Huntington Close I had best watch Mrs. Frances Tulkington, a very wealthy Western divorcée about whom the smart set were much excited, particularly those whose wealth made it difficult to stand the pace of society as it was going at present.

"And before the tragedy," said the editor with another nameless look, as if he were imparting a most valuable piece of gossip, "it was the talk of the town, the attention that Close's lawyer was paying to Mrs. Close. But to her credit let me say that she never gave us a chance to hint at anything, and—well, you know us; we don't need much to make snappy society news."

The editor then waxed even more confidential, for if I am anything at all, I am a good listener, and I have found that often by sitting tight and listening I can get more than if I were a too-eager questioner.

"It really was a shame the way that man Lawrence played his game," he went on. "I understand that it was he who introduced Close to Mrs. T. They were both his clients. Lawrence had fought her case in the courts when she sued old Tulkington for divorce, and a handsome settlement he got for her, too. They say his fee ran up into the hundred thousands—contingent, you know. I don't know what his game was"—here he lowered his voice to a whisper—"but they say Close owes him a good deal of money. You can figure it out for yourself as you like. Now, I've told you all I know. Come in again, Jameson, when you want some more scandal, and remember me to the boys down on the *Star.*"

The following day the maid visited Kennedy at his laboratory while I was reporting to him on the result of my investigations.

She looked worn and haggard. She had spent a sleepless night and begged that Kennedy would not ask her to repeat the experiment.

"I can promise you, Marie," he said, "that you will rest better to-night. But you must spend one more night in Mrs. Close's room. By the way, can you arrange for me to go through the room this morning when you go back?"

Marie said she could, and an hour or so later Craig and I quietly slipped into the Close residence under her guidance. He was carrying something that looked like a miniature barrel, and I had another package which he had given me, both carefully wrapped up. The butler eyed us suspiciously, but Marie spoke a few words to him and I think showed him Mrs. Close's note. Anyhow he said nothing.

Within the room that the unfortunate woman had occupied Kennedy took the coverings off the packages. It was nothing but a portable electric vacuum cleaner, which he quickly attached and set running. Up and down the floor, around and under the bed he pushed the cleaner. He used the various attachments to clean the curtains, the walls, and even the furniture. Particularly did he pay attention to the base board on the wall back of the bed. Then he carefully removed the dust from the cleaner and sealed it up in a leaden box.

He was about to detach and pack up the cleaner when another idea seemed to occur to him. "Might as well make a thorough job of it, Walter," he said, adjusting the apparatus again. "I've cleaned everything but the mattress and the brass bars behind the mattress on the bed. Now

I'll tackle them. I think we ought to go into the suction-cleaning business—more money in it than in being a detective, I'll bet."

The cleaner was run over and under the mattress and along every crack and cranny of the brass bed. This done and this dust also carefully stowed away, we departed, very much to the mystification of Marie and, I could not help feeling, of other eyes that peered in through keyholes or cracks in doors.

"At any rate," said Kennedy exultingly, "I think we have stolen a march on them. I don't believe they were prepared for this, not at least at this stage in the game. Don't ask me any questions, Walter. Then you will have no secrets to keep if anyone should try to pry them loose. Only remember that this man Lawrence is a shrewd character."

The next day Marie came, looking even more careworn than before.

"What's the matter, mademoiselle?" asked Craig. "Didn't you pass a better night?"

"Oh, mon Dieu, I rest well, yes. But this morning while I am at breakfast, Mr. Close send for me. He say that I am discharged. Some servant tell of your visit and he ver-ry angr-ry. And now what is to become of me—will madame his wife give a recommendation now?"

"Walter, we have been discovered," exclaimed Craig with considerable vexation. Then he remembered the poor girl who had been an involuntary sacrifice to our investigation. Turning to her he said: "Marie, I know several very good families, and I am sure you will not suffer for what you have done by being faithful to your mistress. Only be patient a few days. Go live with some of your folks. I will see that you are placed again."

The girl was profuse in her thanks as she dried her tears and departed.

"I hadn't anticipated having my hand forced so soon," said Craig after she had gone, leaving her address. "However, we are on the right track. What was it that you were going to tell me when Marie came in?"

"Something that may be very important, Craig," I said, "though I don't understand it myself. Pressure is being brought to bear on the *Star* to keep this thing out of the papers, or at least to minimize it."

"I'm not surprised," commented Craig. "What do you mean by pressure being brought?"

"Why, Close's lawyer, Lawrence, called up the editor this morning—I don't suppose that you know, but he has some connection with the interests which control the *Star*—and said that the activity of one of the reporters from the *Star,* Jameson by name, was very distasteful to Mr. Close and that this reporter was employing a man named Kennedy to assist him.

"I don't understand it, Craig," I confessed, "but here one day they give the news to the papers, and two days later they almost threaten us with suit if we don't stop publishing it."

"It is perplexing," said Craig, with the air of one who was not a bit perplexed, but rather enlightened.

He pulled down the district telegraph messenger lever three times, and we sat in silence for a while.

"However," he resumed, "I shall be ready for them to-night."

I said nothing. Several minutes elapsed. Then the messenger rapped on the door.

"I want these two notes delivered right away," said Craig to the boy; "here's a quarter for you. Now mind you don't get interested in a detective story and forget the notes. If you are back here quickly with the receipts I'll give you another quarter. Now scurry along."

Then, after the boy had gone, he said casually to me: "Two notes to Close and Gregory, asking them to be present with their attorneys to-night. Close will bring Lawrence, and Gregory will bring a young lawyer named Asche, a very clever fellow. The notes are so worded that they can hardly refuse the invitation."

Meanwhile I carried out an assignment for the *Star,* and telephoned my story in so as to be sure of being with Craig at the crucial moment. For I was thoroughly curious about his next move in the game. I found him still in his laboratory attaching two coils of thin wire to the connections on the outside of a queer-looking little black box.

"What's that?" I asked, eyeing the sinister-looking little box suspiciously. "An infernal machine? You're not going to blow the culprit into eternity, I hope."

"Never mind what it is, Walter. You'll find that out in due time. It may or it may not be an infernal machine—of a different sort than any you have probably ever heard of. The less you know now the less likely you are to give anything away by a look or an act. Come now, make yourself useful as well as ornamental. Take these wires and lay them in the cracks of the floor, and be careful not to let them show. A little dust over them will conceal them beautifully."

Craig now placed the black box back of one of the chairs well down toward the floor, where it could hardly have been perceived unless one were suspecting something of the sort. While he was doing so I ran the wires across the floor, and around the edge of the room to the door.

"There," he said, taking the wires from me. "Now I'll complete the job by carrying them into the next room. And while I'm doing it, go over the wires again and make sure they are absolutely concealed."

That night six men gathered in Kennedy's laboratory. In my utter ignorance of what was about to happen I was perfectly calm, and so were all the rest, except Gregory. He was easily the most nervous of us all, though his lawyer Asche tried repeatedly to reassure him.

"Mr. Close," began Kennedy, "if you and Mr. Lawrence will sit over here on this side of the room while Dr. Gregory and Mr. Asche sit on the opposite side with Mr. Jameson in the middle, I think both of you opposing parties will be better suited. For I apprehend that at various stages in what I am about to say both you, Mr. Close, and you Dr. Gregory, will want to consult your attorneys. That, of course, would be embarrassing, if not impossible, should you be sitting near each other. Now, if we are ready, I shall begin."

Kennedy placed a small leaden casket on the table of his lecture hall. "In this casket," he commenced solemnly, "there is a certain substance which I have recovered from the dust swept up by a vacuum cleaner in the room of Mrs. Close."

One could feel the very air of the room surcharged with excitement. Craig drew on a pair of gloves and carefully opened the casket. With his thumb and forefinger he lifted out a glass tube and held it gingerly at arm's length. My eyes were riveted on it, for the bottom of the tube glowed with a dazzling point of light.

Both Gregory and his attorney and Close and Lawrence whispered to each other when the tube was displayed, as indeed they did throughout the whole exhibition of Kennedy's evidence.

"No infernal machine was ever more subtle," said Craig, "than the tube which I hold in my hand. The imagination of the most sensational writer of fiction might well be thrilled with the mysteries of this fatal tube and its power to work fearful deed. A larger quantity of this substance in the tube would produce on me, as I now hold it, incurable burns, just as it did on its discoverer before his death. A smaller amount, of course, would not act so quickly. The amount in this tube, if distributed about, would produce the burns inevitably, providing I remained near enough for a long-enough time."

Craig paused a moment to emphasize his remarks.

"Here in my hand, gentlemen, I hold the price of a woman's beauty."

He stopped again for several moments, then resumed.

"And now, having shown it to you, for my own safety I will place it back in its leaden casket."

Drawing off his gloves, he proceeded.

"I have found out by a cablegram to-day that seven weeks ago an order for one hundred milligrams of radium bromide at thirty-five dollars a milligram from a certain person in America was filled by a corporation dealing in this substance."

Kennedy said this with measured words, and I felt a thrill run through me as he developed his case.

"At that same time, Mrs. Close began a series of treatments with an X-ray specialist in New York," pursued Kennedy. "Now, it is not generally known outside scientific circles, but the fact is that in their physiological effects the X-ray and radium are quite one and the same. Radium possesses this advantage, however, that no elaborate apparatus is necessary for its use. And, in addition, the emanation from radium is steady and constant, whereas the X-ray at best varies slightly with changing conditions of the current and vacuum in the X-ray tube. Still, the effects on the body are much the same.

"A few days before this order was placed I recall the following despatch which appeared in the New York papers. I will read it:

" 'Liege, Belgium, Oct. —, 1910. What is believed to be the first criminal case in which radium figures as a death-dealing agent is engaging public attention at this university town. A wealthy old bachelor, Pailin by name, was found dead in his flat. A stroke of apoplexy was at first believed to have caused his death, but a close examination revealed a curious discoloration of his skin. A specialist called in to view the body gave as his opinion that the old man had been exposed for a long time to the emanations of X-ray or radium. The police theory is that M. Pailin was done to death by a systematic application of either X-ray or radium by a student in the university who roomed next to him. The student has disappeared.'

"Now here, I believe, was the suggestion which this American criminal followed, for I cut it out of the paper rather expecting sooner or later that some clever person would act on it. I have thoroughly examined the room of Mrs. Close. She herself told me she never wanted to return to it, that her memory of sleepless nights in it was too vivid. That served to fix the impression that I had already formed from reading this clipping. Either the X-ray or radium had caused her dermatitis and nervousness. Which was it? I wished to be sure that I would make no mistake. Of course I knew it was useless to look for an X-ray machine in or near Mrs. Close's room. Such a thing could never have been concealed. The alternative? Radium! Ah! that was different. I determined on an experiment. Mrs. Close's maid was prevailed on to sleep in her mistress's room. Of course radiations of brief duration would do her no permanent harm, although they would produce their effect, nevertheless. In one night the maid became extremely nervous. If she had stayed under them several nights no doubt the beginning of a dermatitis would have affected her, if not more serious trouble. A systematic application, covering weeks and months, might in the end even have led to death.

"The next day I managed, as I have said, to go over the room thoroughly with a vacuum cleaner—a new one of my own which I had bought myself. But tests of the dust which I got from the floors, curtains, and furniture showed nothing at all. As a last thought I had, however, cleaned the mattress of the bed and the cracks and crevices in the brass bars. Tests of that dust showed it to be extremely radioactive. I had the dust dissolved, by a chemist who understands that sort of thing, recrystallized, and the radium salts were extracted from the refuse. Thus I found that I had recovered all but a very few milligrams of the radium that had been originally purchased in London. Here it is in this deadly tube in the leaden casket.

"It is needless to add that the night after I had cleaned out this deadly element the maid slept the sleep of the just—and would have been all right when next I saw her but for the interference of the unjust on whom I had stolen a march."

Craig paused while the lawyers whispered again to their clients. Then he continued: "Now three persons in this room had an opportunity to secrete the contents of this deadly tube in the crevices of the metal work of Mrs. Close's bed. One of these persons must have placed an order through a confidential agent in London to purchase the radium from the English Radium Corporation. One of these persons had a compelling motive, something to gain by using this deadly element.

"The radium in this tube in the casket was secreted, as I have said, in the metal work of Mrs. Close's bed, not in large enough quantities to be immediately fatal, but mixed with dust so as to produce the result more slowly but no less surely, and thus avoid suspicion. At the same time Mrs. Close was persuaded—I will not say by whom—through her natural pride, to take a course of X-ray treatment for a slight defect. That would further serve to divert suspicion. The fact is that a more horrible plot could hardly have been planned or executed. This person sought to ruin her beauty to gain a most selfish and despicable end."

Again Craig paused to let his words sink into our minds.

"Now I wish to state that anything you gentlemen may say will be used against you. That is why I have asked you to bring your attorneys. You may consult with them, of course, while I am getting ready my next disclosure."

As Kennedy had developed his points in the case I had been more and more amazed. But I had not failed to notice how keenly Lawrence was following him.

With half a sneer on his astute face, Lawrence drawled: "I cannot see that you have accomplished anything by this rather extraordinary summoning of us to your laboratory. The evidence is just as black against Dr. Gregory as before. You may think you're clever, Kennedy, but on the very statement of facts as you have brought them out there is plenty of circumstantial evidence against Gregory—more than there was before. As for anyone else in the room, I can't see that you have anything on us—unless perhaps this new evidence you speak of may implicate Asche, or Jameson," he added, including me in a wave of his hand, as if he were already addressing a jury. "It's my opinion that twelve of our peers would be quite as likely to bring in a verdict of guilty against them as against anyone else even remotely connected with this case, except Gregory. No, you'll have to do better than this in your next case, if you expect to maintain that so-called reputation of yours for being a professor of criminal science."

As for Close, taking his cue from his attorney, he scornfully added: "I came to find out some new evidence against the wretch who wrecked the beauty of my wife. All I've got is a tiresome lecture on X-rays and radium. I suppose what you say is true. Well, it only bears out what I thought before. Gregory treated my wife at home, after he saw the damage his office treatments had done. I guess he was capable of making a complete job of it—covering up his carelessness by getting rid of the woman who was such a damning piece of evidence against his professional skill.

Never a shade passed Craig's face as he listened to this tirade. "Excuse me a moment," was all he said, opening the door to leave the room. "I have just one more fact to disclose. I will be back directly."

Kennedy was gone several minutes, during which Close and Lawrence fell to whispering behind their hands, with the assurance of those who believed that this was only Kennedy's method of admitting a defeat. Gregory and Asche exchanged a few words similarly, and it was plain that Asche was endeavoring to put a better interpretation on something than Gregory himself dared hope.

As Kennedy re-entered, Close was buttoning up his coat preparatory to leaving, and Lawrence was lighting a fresh cigar.

In his hand Kennedy held a notebook. "My stenographer writes a very legible shorthand; at least I find it so—from long practice, I suppose. As I glance over her notes I find many facts which will interest you later—at the trial. But—ah, here at the end—let me read:

" 'Well, he's very clever, but he has nothing against me, has he?'

" 'No, not unless he can produce the agent who bought the radium for you.'

" 'But he can't do that. No one could ever have recognized you on your flying trip to London disguised as a diamond merchant who had just learned that he could make his faulty diamonds good by applications of radium and who wanted a good stock of the stuff.'

" 'Still, we'll have to drop the suit against Gregory after all, in spite of what I said. That part is hopelessly spoiled.'

" 'Yes, I suppose so. Oh, well, I'm free now. She can hardly help but consent to a divorce now, and a quiet settlement. She brought it on herself—we tried every other way to do it, but she—she was too good to fall into it. She forced us to it.'

" 'Yes, you'll get a good divorce now. But can't we shut up this man Kennedy? Even if he can't prove anything against us, the mere rumor of such a thing coming to the ears of Mrs. Tulkington would be unpleasant.'

" 'Go as far as you like, Lawrence. You know what the marriage will mean to me. It will settle my debts to you and all the rest.'

" 'I'll see what I can do, Close. He'll be back in a moment.' "

Close's face was livid. "It's a pack of lies!" he shouted, advancing toward Kennedy, "a pack of lies! You are a fakir and a blackmailer. I'll have you in jail for this, by God—and you too, Gregory."

"One moment, please," said Kennedy calmly. "Mr. Lawrence, will you be so kind as to reach behind your chair? What do you find?"

Lawrence lifted up the plain black box and with it he pulled up the wires which I had so carefully concealed in the cracks of the floor.

"That," said Kennedy, "is a little instrument called the microphone. Its chief merit lies in the fact that it will magnify a sound sixteen hundred times, and carry it to any given point where you wish to place the receiver. Originally this device was invented for the aid of the deaf, but I see no reason why it should not be used to aid the law. One needn't eavesdrop at the key-hole with this little instrument about. Inside that box there is nothing but a series of plugs from which wires, much finer than a thread, are stretched taut. Yet a fly walking near it will make a noise as loud as a draft-horse. If the microphone is placed in any part of the room, especially if near the persons talking—even if they are talking in a whisper—a whisper such as occurred several times during the evening and particularly while I was in the next room getting the notes made by my stenographer—a whisper, I say, is like shouting your guilt from the house-tops.

"You two men, Close and Lawrence, may consider yourselves under arrest for conspiracy and whatever other indictments will lie against such creatures as you. The police will be here in a moment. No, Close, violence won't do now. The doors are locked—and see, we are four to two."

The Black Hand

BY ARTHUR B. REEVE

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KENNEDY and I had been dining rather late one evening at Luigi's, a little Italian restaurant on the lower West Side. We had known the place well in our student days, and had made a point of visiting it once a month since, in order to keep in practice in the fine art of gracefully handling long shreds of spaghetti. Therefore we did not think it strange when the proprietor himself stopped a moment at our table to greet us. Glancing furtively around at the other diners, mostly Italians, he suddenly leaned over and whispered to Kennedy:

"I have heard of your wonderful detective work, Professor. Could you give a little advice in the case of a friend of mine?"

"Surely, Luigi. What is the case?" asked Craig, leaning back in his chair.

Luigi glanced around again apprehensively and lowered his voice. "Not so loud, sir. When you pay your check, go out, walk around Washington Square, and come in at the private entrance. I'll be waiting in the hall. My friend is dining privately upstairs."

We lingered a while over our chianti, then quietly paid the check and departed.

True to his word, Luigi was waiting for us in the dark hall. With a motion that indicated silence, he led us up the stairs to the second floor, and quickly opened a door into what seemed to be a fair-sized private dining-room. A man was pacing the floor nervously. On a table was some food, untouched. As the door opened I thought he started as if in fear, and I am sure his dark face blanched, if only for an instant. Imagine our surprise at seeing Gennaro, the great tenor, with whom merely to have a speaking acquaintance was to argue oneself famous.

"Oh, it is you, Luigi," he exclaimed in perfect English, rich and mellow. "And who are these gentlemen?"

Luigi merely replied, "Friends," in English also, and then dropped off into a voluble, lowtoned explanation in Italian.

I could see, as we waited, that the same idea had flashed over Kennedy's mind as over my own. It was now three or four days since the papers had reported the strange kidnapping of Gennaro's five-year-old daughter Adelina, his only child, and the sending of a demand for ten thousand dollars ransom, signed, as usual, with the mystic Black Hand—a name to conjure with in blackmail and extortion.

As Signor Gennaro advanced toward us, after his short talk with Luigi, almost before the introductions were over, Kennedy anticipated him by saying: "I understand, Signor, before you ask me. I have read all about it in the papers. You want someone to help you catch the criminals who are holding your little girl."

"No, no!" exclaimed Gennaro excitedly. "Not that. I want to get my daughter first. After that, catch them if you can—yes, I should like to have someone do it. But read this first and tell me what you think of it. How should I act to get my little Adelina back without harming a hair of her head?" The famous singer drew from a capacious pocketbook a dirty, crumpled letter, scrawled on cheap paper.

Kennedy translated it quickly. It read:

Honorable sir: Your daughter is in safe hands. But, by the saints, if you give this letter to the police as you did the other, not only she but your family also, someone near to you, will suffer. We will not fail as we did Wednesday. If you want your daughter back, go yourself, alone and without telling a soul, to Enrico Albano's Saturday night at the twelfth hour. You must provide yourself with $10,000 in bills hidden in Saturday's *Il Progresso Italiano*. In the back room you will see a man sitting alone at a table. He will have a red flower on his coat. You are to say, "A fine opera is 'I Pagliacci.'" If he answers, "Not without Gennaro," lay the newspaper down on the table. He will pick it up, leaving his own, the *Bolletino*. On the third page you will find written the place where your daughter has been left waiting for you. Go immediately and get her. But, by the God, if you have so much as the shadow of the police near Enrico's your daughter will be sent to you in a box that night. Do not fear to come. We pledge our word to deal fairly if you deal fairly. This is a last warning. Lest you shall forget we will show one other sign of our power tomorrow. LA MANO NERA.

The end of this ominous letter was gruesomely decorated with a skull and cross-bones, a rough drawing of a dagger thrust through a bleeding heart, a coffin, and, under all, a huge black hand. There was no doubt about the type of letter that it was. It was such as have of late years become increasingly common in all our large cities, baffling the best detectives.

"You have not showed this to the police, I presume?" asked Kennedy.

"Naturally not."

"Are you going Saturday night?"

"I am afraid to go and afraid to stay away," was the reply, and the voice of the fifty-thousand-dollars-a-season tenor was as human as that of a five-dollar-a-week father, for at bottom all men, high or low, are one.

"'We will not fail as we did Wednesday,'" reread Craig. "What does that mean?"

Gennaro fumbled in his pocketbook again, and at last drew forth a typewritten letter bearing the letter-head of the Leslie Laboratories, Incorporated.

"After I received the first threat," explained Gennaro, "my wife and I went from our apartments at the hotel to her father's, the banker Cesare, you know, who lives on Fifth Avenue. I gave the letter to the Italian Squad of the police. The next morning my father-in-law's butler noticed something peculiar about the milk. He barely touched some of it to his tongue, and he has been violently ill ever since. I at once sent the milk to the laboratory of my friend Doctor Leslie to have it analyzed. This letter shows what the household escaped."

"My dear Gennaro," read Kennedy. "The milk submitted to us for examination on the 10th inst. has been carefully analyzed, and I beg to hand you herewith the result:

"Specific gravity 1.036 at 15 degrees Cent.

Water	84.60	per cent.
Casein	3.49	" "
Albumin	.56	" "
Globulin	1.32	" "
Lactose	5.08	" "
Ash	.72	" "
Fat	3.42	" "
Ricin	1.19	" "

"Ricin is a new and little-known poison derived from the shell of the castor-oil bean. Professor Ehrlich states that one gram of the pure poison will kill 1,500,000 guinea pigs. Ricin was lately isolated by Professor Robert, of Rostock, but is seldom found except in an impure state, though still very deadly. It surpasses strychnin, prussic acid, and other commonly known drugs. I congratulate you and yours on escaping and shall of course respect your wishes absolutely regarding keeping secret this attempt on your life. Believe me,

"Very sincerely yours,
"C. W. Leslie."

As Kennedy handed the letter back, he remarked significantly: "I can see very readily why you don't care to have the police figure in your case. It has got quite beyond ordinary police methods."

"And to-morrow, too, they are going to give another sign of their power," groaned Gennaro, sinking into the chair before his untasted food.

"You say you have left your hotel?" inquired Kennedy.

"Yes. My wife insisted that we would be more safely guarded at the residence of her father, the banker. But we are afraid even there since the poison attempt. So I have come here secretly to Luigi, my old friend Luigi, who is preparing food for us, and in a few minutes one of Cesare's automobiles will be here, and I will take the food up to her—sparing no expense or trouble. She is heart-broken. It will kill her, Professor Kennedy, if anything happens to our little Adelina.

"Ah, sir, I am not poor myself. A month's salary at the opera-house, that is what they ask of me. Gladly would I give it, ten thousand dollars—all, if they asked it, of my contract with Herr Schleppencour, the director. But the police —bah!—they are all for catching the villains. What good will it do me if they catch them and my little Adelina is returned to me dead? It is all very well for the Anglo-Saxon to talk of justice and the law, but I am—what you call it?—an emotional Latin. I want my little daughter—and at any cost. Catch the villains afterward—yes. I will pay double then to catch them so that they cannot blackmail me again. Only first I want my daughter back."

"And your father-in-law?"

"My father-in-law, he has been among you long enough to be one of you. He has fought them. He has put up a sign in his banking-house, 'No money paid on threats.' But I say it is foolish. I do not know America as well as he, but I know this: the police never succeed—the ransom is paid without their knowledge, and they very often take the credit. I say, pay first, then I will swear a righteous vendetta—I will bring the dogs to justice with the money yet on them. Only show me how, show me how."

"First of all," replied Kennedy, "I want you to answer one question, truthfully, without reservation, as to a friend. I am your friend, believe me. Is there any person, a relative or acquaintance of yourself or your wife or your father-in-law, whom you even have reason to suspect of being capable of extorting money from you in this way? I needn't say that that is the experience of the district attorney's office in the large majority of cases of this so-called Black Hand."

"No," replied the tenor without hesitation. "I know that, and I have thought about it. No, I can think of no one. I know you Americans often speak of the Black Hand as a myth coined originally by a newspaper writer. Perhaps it has no organization. But, Professor Kennedy, to me it is no myth. What if the real Black Hand is any gang of criminals who choose to use that convenient name to extort money? Is it the less real? My daughter is gone!"

"Exactly," agreed Kennedy. "It is not a theory that confronts you. It is a hard, cold fact. I understand that perfectly. What is the address of this Albano's?"

Luigi mentioned a number on Mulberry Street, and Kennedy made a note of it.

"It is a gambling saloon," explained Luigi. "Albano is a Neapolitan, a Camorrista, one of my countrymen of whom I am thoroughly ashamed, Professor Kennedy."

"Do you think this Albano had anything to do with the letter?"

Luigi shrugged his shoulders.

Just then a big limousine was heard outside. Luigi picked up a huge hamper that was placed in a corner of the room and, followed closely by Signor Gennaro, hurried down to it. As the tenor left us he grasped our hands in each of his.

"I have an idea in my mind," said Craig simply. "I will try to think it out in detail to-night. Where can I find you to-morrow?"

"Come to me at the opera-house in the afternoon, or if you want me sooner at Mr. Cesare's residence. Good night, and a thousand thanks to you, Professor Kennedy, and to you, also, Mr. Jameson. I trust you absolutely because Luigi trusts you."

We sat in the little dining-room until we heard the door of the limousine bang shut and the car shoot off with the rattle of the changing gears.

"One more question, Luigi," said Craig as the door opened again. "I have never been on that block in Mulberry Street where this Albano's is. Do you happen to know any of the shopkeepers on it or near it?"

"I have a cousin who has a drug-store on the corner below Albano's, on the same side of the street."

"Good! Do you think he would let me use his store for a few minutes Saturday night—of course without any risk to himself?"

"I think I could arrange it."

"Very well. Then to-morrow, say at nine in the morning, I will stop here, and we will all go over to see him. Good night, Luigi, and many thanks for thinking of me in connection with this case. I've enjoyed Signor Gennaro's singing often enough at the opera to want to render him this service, and I'm only too glad to be able to be of service to all honest Italians; that is, if I succeed in carrying out a plan I have in mind."

A little before nine the following day Kennedy and I dropped into Luigi's again. Kennedy was carrying a suitcase which he had taken over from his laboratory to our rooms the night before. Luigi was waiting for us, and without losing a minute we sallied forth.

By means of the tortuous twists of streets in old Greenwich village we came out at last on Bleecker Street and began walking east amid the hurly-burly of races of lower New York. We had not quite reached Mulberry Street when our attention was attracted by a large crowd on one of the busy corners, held back by a cordon of police who were endeavoring to keep the people moving with that burly good nature which the six-foot Irish policeman displays toward the five-foot burden-bearers of southern and eastern Europe who throng New York.

Apparently, we saw, as we edged up into the front of the crowd, here was a building whose whole front had literally been torn off and wrecked. The thick plate-glass of the windows was smashed to a mass of greenish splinters on the sidewalk, while the windows of the upper floors and for several houses down the block in either street were likewise broken. Some thick iron bars which had formerly protected the windows were now bent and twisted. A huge hole yawned in the floor inside the doorway, and peering in we could see the desks and chairs a tangled mass of kindling.

"What's the matter?" I inquired of an officer near me, displaying my reporter's fire-line badge, more for its moral effect than in the hope of getting any real information in these days of enforced silence toward the press.

"Black Hand bomb," was the laconic reply.

"Whew!" I whistled. "Anyone hurt?"

"They don't usually kill anyone, do they?" asked the officer by way of reply to test my acquaintance with such things.

"No," I admitted. "They destroy more property than lives. But did they get anyone this time? This must have been a thoroughly over-loaded bomb, I should judge by the looks of things."

"Came pretty close to it. The bank hadn't any more than opened when, bang! went this gas-pipe-and-dynamite thing. Crowd collected before the smoke had fairly cleared. Man who owns the bank was hurt, but not badly. Now come, beat it down to headquarters if you want to find out any more. You'll find it printed on the pink slip—the 'squeal book'—by this time. 'Gainst the rules for me to talk," he added with a good-natured grin, then to the crowd: "G'wan, now. You're blockin' traffic. Keep movin'."

I turned to Craig and Luigi. Their eyes were riveted on the big gilt sign, half broken, and all askew overhead. It read:

CIRO DI CESARE & CO. BANKERS

NEW YORK, GENOA, NAPLES, ROME, PALERMO

"This is the reminder so that Gennaro and his father-in-law will not forget," I gasped.

"Yes," added Craig, pulling us away, "and Cesare himself is wounded, too. Perhaps that was for putting up the notice refusing to pay. Perhaps not. It's a queer case—they usually set the bombs off at night when no one is around. There must be more back of this than merely to scare Gennaro. It looks to me as if they were after Cesare, too, first by poison, then by dynamite."

We shouldered our way out through the crowd and went on until we came to Mulberry Street, pulsing with life. Down we went past the little shops, dodging the children, and making way for women with huge bundles of sweat-shop clothing accurately balanced on their heads or hugged up under their capacious capes. Here was just one little colony of the hundreds of thousands of Italians—a population larger than the Italian population of Rome—of whose life the rest of New York knew and cared nothing.

At last we came to Albano's little wine-shop, a dark, evil, malodorous place on the street level of a five-story, alleged "new-law" tenement. Without hesitation Kennedy entered, and we followed, acting the part of a slumming party.

There were a few customers at this early hour, men out of employment and an inoffensive-looking lot, though of course they eyed us sharply. Albano himself proved to be a greasy, low-browed fellow who had a sort of cunning look. I could well imagine such a fellow spreading terror in the hearts of simple folk by merely pressing both temples with his thumbs and drawing his long bony fore-finger under his throat—the so-called Black Hand sign that has shut up many a witness in the middle of his testimony even in open court.

We pushed through to the low-ceilinged back room, which was empty, and sat down at a table. Over a bottle of Albano's famous California "red ink" we sat silently. Kennedy was making a mental note of the place. In the middle of the ceiling was a single gas-burner with a big reflector over it. In the back wall of the room was a horizontal oblong window, barred, and with a sash that opened like a transom. The tables were dirty and the chairs rickety. The walls were bare and unfinished, with beams innocent of decoration. Altogether it was as unprepossessing a place as I had ever seen.

Apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, Kennedy got up to go, complimenting the proprietor on his wine. I could see that Kennedy had made up his mind as to his course of action.

"How sordid crime really is," he remarked as we walked on down the street. "Look at that place of Albano's. I defy even the police news reporter on the *Star* to find any glamour in that."

Our next stop was at the corner at the little store kept by the cousin of Luigi, who conducted us back of the partition where prescriptions were compounded, and found us chairs.

A hurried explanation from Luigi brought a cloud to the open face of the druggist, as if he hesitated to lay himself and his little fortune open to the blackmailers. Kennedy saw it and interrupted.

"All that I wish to do," he said, "is to put in a little instrument here and use it to-night for a few minutes. Indeed, there will be no risk to you, Vincenzo. Secrecy is what I desire, and no one will ever know about it."

Vincenzo was at length convinced, and Craig opened his suit-case. There was little in it except several coils of insulated wire, some tools, a couple of packages wrapped up, and a couple of pairs of overalls. In a moment Kennedy had donned overalls and was smearing dirt and grease over his face and hands. Under his direction I did the same.

Taking the bag of tools, the wire, and one of the small packages, we went out on the street and then up through the dark and ill-ventilated hall of the tenement. Half-way up a woman stopped us suspicioulsy.

"Telephone company," said Craig curtly. "Here's permission from the owner of the house to string wires across the roof."

He pulled an old letter out of his pocket, but as it was too dark to read even if the woman had cared to do so, we went on up as he had expected, unmolested. At last we came to the roof, where there were some children at play a couple of houses down from us.

Kennedy began by dropping two strands of wire down to the ground in the back yard behind Vincenzo's shop. Then he proceeded to lay two wires along the edge of the roof.

We had worked only a little while when the children began to collect. However, Kennedy kept right on until we reached the tenement next to that in which Albano's shop was.

"Walter," he whispered, "just get the children away for a minute now."

"Look here, you kids," I yelled, "some of you will fall off if you get so close to the edge of the roof. Keep back."

It had no effect. Apparently they looked not a bit frightened at the dizzy mass of clothes-lines below us.

"Say, is there a candy-store on this block?" I asked in desperation.

"Yes, sir," came the chorus.

"Who'll go down and get me a bottle of ginger ale?" I asked.

A chorus of voices and glittering eyes was the answer. They all would. I took a half-dollar from my pocket and gave it to the oldest.

"All right now, hustle along, and divide the change."

With the scamper of many feet they were gone, and we were alone. Kennedy had now reached Albano's and as soon as the last head had disappeared below the scuttle of the roof he dropped two long strands down into the back yard, as he had done at Vincenzo's.

I started to go back, but he stopped me.

"Oh, that will never do," he said. "The kids will see that the wires end here. I must carry them on several houses farther as a blind and trust to luck that they don't see the wire leading down below."

We were several houses down, still putting up wires when the crowd came shouting back, sticky with cheap trust-made candy and black with East Side chocolate. We opened the ginger ale and forced ourselves to drink it so as to excite no suspicion, then a few minutes later descended the stairs of the tenement, coming out just above Albano's.

I was wondering how Kennedy was going to get into Albano's again without exciting suspicion. He solved it neatly.

"Now, Walter, do you think you could stand another dip into that red ink of Albano's?"

I said I might in the interests of science and justice—not otherwise.

"Well, your face is sufficiently dirty," he commented, "so that with the overalls you don't look very much as you did the first time you went in. I don't think they will recognize you. Do I look pretty good?"

"You look like a coal-heaver out of a job," I said. "I can scarcely restrain my admiration."

"All right. Then take this little glass bottle. Go into the back room and order something cheap, in keeping with your looks. Then when you are all alone break the bottle. It is full of gas drippings. Your nose will dictate what to do next. Just tell the proprietor you saw the gas company's wagon on the next block and come up here and tell me."

I entered. There was a sinister-looking man, with a sort of unscrupulous intelligence, writing at a table. As he wrote and puffed at his cigar, I noticed a scar on his face, a deep furrow running from the lobe of his ear to his mouth. That, I knew, was a brand set upon him by the Camorra. I sat and smoked and sipped slowly for several minutes, cursing him inwardly more for his presence than for his evident look of the *"mala vita."* At last he went out to ask the barkeeper for a stamp.

Quickly I tiptoed over to another corner of the room and ground the little bottle under my heel. Then I resumed my seat. The odor that pervaded the room was sickening.

The sinister-looking man with the scar came in again and sniffed. I sniffed. Then the proprietor came in and sniffed.

"Say," I said in the toughest voice I could assume, "you got a leak. Wait. I seen the gas company wagon on the next block when I came in. I'll get the man."

I dashed out and hurried up the street to the place where Kennedy was waiting impatiently. Rattling his tools, he followed me with apparent reluctance.

As he entered the wine-shop he snorted, after the manner of gas-men, "Where's de leak?"

"You find-a da leak," grunted Albano. "What-a you get-a pay for? You want-a me do your work?"

"Well, half a dozen o' you wops get out o' here, that's all. D'youse all wanter be blown ter pieces wid dem pipes and cigarettes? Clear out," growled Kennedy.

They retreated precipitately, and Craig hastily opened his bag of tools.

"Quick, Walter, shut the door and hold it," exclaimed Craig, working rapidly. He unwrapped a little package and took out a round, flat, disc-like thing of black vulcanized rubber. Jumping up on a table, he fixed it to the top of the reflector over the gas-jet.

"Can you see that from the floor, Walter?" he asked under his breath.

"No," I replied, "not even when I know it is there."

Then he attached a couple of wires to it and let them across the ceiling toward the window, concealing them carefully by sticking them in the shadow of a beam. At the window he quickly attached the wires to the two that were dangling down from the roof and shoved them around out of sight.

"We'll have to trust that no one sees them," he said. "That's the best I can do at such short notice. I never saw a room so bare as this, anyway. There isn't another place I could put that thing without its being seen."

We gathered up the broken glass of the gas-drippings bottle, and I opened the door.

"It's all right, now," said Craig, sauntering out before the bar. "Only de next time you has anyt'ing de matter call de company up. I ain't supposed to do dis wit'out orders, see?"

A moment later I followed, glad to get out of the oppressive atmosphere, and joined him in the back of Vincenzo's drugstore, where he was again at work. As there was no back window there, it was quite a job to lead the wires around the outside from the back yard and in at a side window. It was at last done, however, without exciting suspicion, and Kennedy attached them to an oblong box of weathered oak and a pair of specially constructed dry batteries.

"Now," said Craig, as we washed off the stains of work and stowed the overalls back in the suit-case, "that is done to my satisfaction. I can tell Gennaro to go ahead safely now and meet the Black-Handers."

From Vincenzo's we walked over toward Centre Street, where Kennedy and I left Luigi to return to his restaurant, with instructions to be at Vincenzo's at half-past eleven that night.

We turned into the new police headquarters and went down the long corridor to the Italian Bureau. Kennedy sent in his card to Lieutenant Giuseppe in charge, and we were quickly admitted. The lieutenant was a short, full-faced, fleshy Italian, with lightish hair and eyes that were apparently dull, until you suddenly discovered that that was merely a cover to their really restless way of taking in everything and fixing the impressions on his mind, as if on a sensitive plate.

"I want to talk about the Gennaro case," began Craig. "I may add that I have been rather closely associated with Inspector O'Connor of the Central Office on a number of cases, so that I think we can trust each other. Would you mind telling me what you know about it if I promise you that I, too, have something to reveal?"

The lieutenant leaned back and watched Kennedy closely without seeming to do so. "When I was in Italy last year," he replied at length, "I did a good deal of work in tracing up some Camorra suspects. I had a tip about some of them to look up their records—I needn't say where it came from, but it was a good one. Much of the evidence against some of those fellows who are being tried at Viterbo was gathered by the Carabinieri as a result of hints that I was able to give them—clues that were furnished to me here in America from the source I speak of. I suppose there is really no need to conceal it, though. The original tip came from a certain banker here in New York."

"I can guess who it was," nodded Craig.

"Then, as you know, this banker is a fighter. He is the man who organized the White Hand—an organization which is trying to rid the Italian population of the Black Hand. His society had a lot of evidence regarding former members of both the Camorra in Naples and the Mafia in Sicily, as well as the Black Hand gangs in New York, Chicago, and other cities. Well, Cesare, as you know, is Gennaro's father-in-law.

"While I was in Naples looking up the record of a certain criminal I heard of a peculiar murder committed some years ago. There was an honest old music master who apparently lived the quietest and most harmless of lives. But it became known that he was supported by Cesare and had received handsome presents of money from him. The old man was, as you may have guessed, the first music teacher of Gennaro, the man who discovered him. One might have been at a loss to see how he could have an enemy, but there was one who coveted his small fortune. One day he was stabbed and robbed. His murderer ran out into the street, crying out that the poor man had been killed. Naturally a crowd rushed up in a moment, for it was in the middle of the day. Before the injured man could make it understood who had struck him the assassin was down the street and lost in the maze of old Naples where he well knew the houses of his friends who would hide him. The man who is known to have committed that crime—Francesco Paoli—escaped to New York. We are looking for him to-day. He is a clever man, far above the average—son of a doctor in a town a few miles from Naples, went to the university, was expelled for some mad prank—in short, he was the black sheep of the family. Of course over here he is too high-born to work with his hands on a railroad or in a trench, and not educated enough to work at anything else. So he has been preying on his more industrious countrymen—a typical case of a man living by his wits with no visible means of support.

"Now I don't mind telling you in strict confidence," continued the lieutenant, "that it's my theory that old Cesare has seen Paoli here, knew he was wanted for that murder of the old music master, and gave me the tip to look up his record. At any rate Paoli disappeared right after I returned from Italy, and we haven't been able to locate him since. He must have found out in some way that the tip to look him up had been given by the White Hand. He had been a Camorrista, in Italy, and had many ways of getting information here in America."

He paused, and balanced a piece of cardboard in his hand.

"It is my theory of this case that if we could locate this Paoli we could solve the kidnapping of little Adelina Gennaro very quickly. That's his picture."

Kennedy and I bent over to look at it, and I started in surprise. It was my evil-looking friend with the scar on his cheek.

"Well," said Craig, quietly handing back the card, "whether or not he is the man, I know where we can catch the kidnappers to-night, Lieutenant."

It was Giuseppe's turn to show surprise now.

"With your assistance I'll get this man and the whole gang to-night," explained Craig, rapidly sketching over his plan and concealing just enough to make sure that no matter how anxious the lieutenant was to get the credit he could not spoil the affair by premature interference.

The final arrangement was that four of the best men of the squad were to hide in a vacant store across from Vincenzo's early in the evening, long before anyone was watching. The signal for them to appear was to be the extinguishing of the lights behind the colored bottles in the druggist's window. A taxicab was to be kept waiting at headquarters at the same time with three other good men ready to start for a given address the moment the alarm was given over the telephone.

We found Gennaro awaiting us with the greatest anxiety at the opera-house. The bomb at Cesare's had been the last straw. Gennaro had already drawn from his bank ten crisp one-thousand-dollar bills, and already had a copy of *Il Progresso* in which he had hidden the money between the sheets.

"Mr. Kennedy," he said, "I am going to meet them to-night. They may kill me. See, I have provided myself with a pistol—I shall fight, too, if necessary for my little Adelina. But if it is only money they want, they shall have it."

"One thing I want to say," began Kennedy.

"No, no, no!" cried the tenor. "I will go—you shall not stop me."

"I don't wish to stop you," Craig reassured him. "But one thing—do exactly as I tell you, and I swear not a hair of the child's head will be injured and we will get the blackmailers, too."

"How?" eagerly asked Gennaro. "What do you want me to do?"

"All I want you to do is to go to Albano's at the appointed time. Sit down in the back room. Get into conversation with them, and, above all, Signor, as soon as you get the copy of the *Bolletino* turn to the third page, pretend not to be able to read the address. Ask the man to read it. Then repeat it after him. Pretend to be overjoyed. Offer to set up wine for the whole crowd. Just a few minutes, that is all I ask, and I will guarantee that you will be the happiest man in New York to-morrow."

Gennaro's eyes filled with tears as he grasped Kennedy's hand. "That is better than having the whole police force back of me," he said. "I shall never forget, never forget."

As we went out Kennedy remarked: "You can't blame them for keeping their troubles to themselves. Here we send a police officer over to Italy to look up the records of some of the worst suspects. He loses his life. Another takes his place. Then after he gets back he is set to work on the mere clerical routine of translating them. One of his associates is reduced in rank. And so what does it come to? Hundreds of records have become useless because the three years within which the criminals could be deported have elapsed with nothing done. Intelligent, isn't it? I believe it has been established that all but about fifty of seven hundred known Italian suspects are still at large, mostly in this city. And the rest of the Italian population is guarded from them by a squad of police in number scarcely one-thirtieth of the number of known criminals. No, it's our fault if the Black Hand thrives."

We had been standing on the corner of Broadway, waiting for a car.

"Now, Walter, don't forget. Meet me at the Bleecker Street station of the subway at eleven-thirty. I'm off to the university. I have some very important experiments with phosphorescent salts that I want to finish to-day."

"What has that to do with the case?" I asked mystified.

"Nothing," replied Craig. "I didn't say it had. At eleven-thirty, don't forget. By George, though, that Paoli must be a clever one—think of his knowing about ricin. I only heard of it myself recently. Well, here's my car. Good-bye."

Craig swung aboard an Amsterdam Avenue car, leaving me to kill eight nervous hours of my weekly day of rest from the *Star*.

They passed at length, and at precisely the appointed time Kennedy and I met. With suppressed excitement, at least on my part, we walked over to Vincenzo's. At night this section of the city was indeed a black enigma. The lights in the shops where olive oil, fruit, and other things were sold, were winking out one by one; here and there strains of music floated out of wine-shops, and little groups lingered on corners conversing in animated sentences. We passed Albano's on the other side of the street, being careful not to look at it too closely, for several men were hanging idly about—pickets, apparently, with some secret code that would instantly have spread far and wide the news of any alarming action.

At the corner we crossed and looked in Vincenzo's window a moment, casting a furtive glance across the street at the dark empty store where the police must be hiding. Then we went in and casually sauntered back of the partition. Luigi was there already. There were several customers still in the store, however, and therefore we had to sit in silence while

Vincenzo quickly finished a prescription and waited on the last one.

At last the doors were locked and the lights lowered, all except those in the windows which were to serve as signals.

"Ten minutes to twelve," said Kennedy, placing the oblong box on the table. "Gennaro will be going in soon. Let us try this machine now and see if it works. If the wires have been cut since we put them up this morning Gennaro will have to take his chances alone."

Kennedy reached over and with a light movement of his forefinger touched a switch.

Instantly a babel of voices filled the store, all talking at once, rapidly and loudly. Here and there we could distinguish a snatch of conversation, a word, a phrase, now and then even a whole sentence above the rest. There was a clink of glasses. I could hear the rattle of dice on a bare table, and an oath. A cork popped. Somebody scratched a match.

We sat bewildered, looking at Kennedy for an explanation.

"Imagine that you are sitting at a table in Albano's back room," was all he said. "This is what you would be hearing. This is my 'electric ear'—in other words the dictograph, used, I am told, by the Secret Service of the United States. Wait, in a moment you will hear Gennaro come in. Luigi and Vincenzo, translate what you hear. My knowledge of Italian is pretty rusty."

"Can they hear us?" whispered Luigi in an awe-struck whisper.

Craig laughed. "No, not yet. But I have only to touch this other switch, and I could produce an effect in that room that would rival the famous writing on Belshazzar's wall—only it would be a voice from the wall instead of writing."

"They seem to be waiting for someone," said Vincenzo. "I heard somebody say: 'He will be here in a few minutes. Now get out.'"

The babel of voices seemed to calm down as men withdrew from the room. Only one or two were left.

"One of them says the child is all right. She has been left in the back yard," translated Luigi.

"What yard? Did he say?" asked Kennedy.

"No; they just speak of it as the 'yard,'" replied Luigi.

"Jameson, go outside in the store to the telephone booth and call up headquarters. Ask them if the automobile is ready, with the men in it."

I rang up, and after a moment the police central answered that everything was right.

"Then tell central to hold the line clear—we mustn't lose a moment. Jameson, you stay in the booth. Vincenzo, you pretend to be working around your window, but not in such a way as to attract attention, for they have men watching the street very carefully. What is it, Luigi?"

"Gennaro is coming. I just heard one of them say, 'Here he comes.'"

Even from the booth I could hear the dictograph repeating the conversation in the dingy little back room of Albano's, down the street.

"He's ordering a bottle of red wine," murmured Luigi, dancing up and down with excitement.

Vincenzo was so nervous that he knocked a bottle down in the window, and I believe that my heart-beats were almost audible over the telephone which I was holding, for the police operator called me down for asking so many times if all was ready.

"There it is—the signal," cried Craig. "'A fine opera is "I Pagliacci."' Now listen for the answer."

A moment elapsed, then, "Not without Gennaro," came a gruff voice in Italian from the dictograph.

A silence ensued. It was tense.

"Wait, wait," said a voice which I recognized instantly as Gennaro's. "I cannot read this. What is this 23½ Prince Street?"

"No, 33½. She has been left in the back yard," answered the voice.

"Jameson," called Craig, "tell them to drive straight to 33½ Prince Street. They will find the girl in the back yard—quick, before the Black Handers have a chance to go back on their word."

I fairly shouted my orders to the police headquarters. "They're off," came back the answer, and I hung up the receiver.

"What was that?" Craig was asking of Luigi. "I didn't catch it. What did they say?"

"That other voice said to Gennaro, 'Sit down while I count this.'"

"Sh! he's talking again."

"If it is a penny less than ten thousand or I find a mark on the bills I'll call to Enrico, and your daughter will be spirited away again," translated Luigi.

"Now, Gennaro is talking," said Craig. "Good—he is gaining time. He is a trump. I can distinguish that all right. He's asking the gruff-voiced fellow if he will have another bottle of wine. He says he will. Good. They must be at Prince Street now—we'll give them a few minutes more, not too much, for word will be back to Albano's like wildfire, and they will get Gennaro after all. Ah, they are drinking again. What was that, Luigi? The money is all right, he says? Now, Vincenzo, out with the lights!"

A door banged open across the street, and four huge dark figures darted out in the direction of Albano's.

With his finger Kennedy pulled down the other switch and shouted: "Gennaro, this is Kennedy! To the street! *Polizia! Polizia!*"

A scuffle and a cry of surprise followed. A second voice, apparently from the bar, shouted, "Out with the lights, out with the lights!"

Bang! went a pistol, and another.

The dictograph, which had been all sound a moment before, was as mute as a cigar-box.

"What's the matter?" I asked Kennedy, as he rushed past me.

"They have shot out the lights. My receiving instrument is destroyed. Come on, Jameson; Vincenzo, stay back, if you don't want to appear in this."

A short figure rushed by me, faster even than I could go. It was the faithful Luigi.

In front of Albano's an exciting fight was going on. Shots were being fired wildly in the darkness, and heads were popping out of tenement windows on all sides. As Kennedy and I flung ourselves into the crowd we caught a glimpse of Gennaro, with blood streaming from a cut on his shoulder, struggling with a policeman while Luigi vainly was trying to interpose himself between them. A man, held by another policeman, was urging the first officer on. "That's the man," he was crying. "That's the kidnapper. I caught him."

In a moment Kennedy was behind him. "Paoli, you lie. You are the kidnapper. Seize him—he has the money on him. That other is Gennaro himself."

The policeman released the tenor, and both of them seized Paoli. The others were beating at the door, which was being frantically barricaded inside.

Just then a taxicab came swinging up the street. Three men jumped out and added their strength to those who were battering down Albano's barricade.

Gennaro, with a cry, leaped into the taxicab. Over his shoulder I could see a tangled mass of dark brown curls, and a childish voice lisped: "Why didn't you come for me, papa? The bad man told me if I waited in the yard you would come for me. But if I cried he said he would shoot me. And I waited, and waited—"

"There, there, 'Lina; papa's going to take you straight home to mother."

A crash followed as the door yielded, and the famous Paoli gang was in the hands of the law.

The Steel Door

BY ARTHUR B. REEVE

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IT was what, in college, we used to call "good football weather"—a crisp autumn afternoon that sent the blood tingling through brain and muscle. Kennedy and I were enjoying a stroll on the drive, dividing our attention between the glowing red sunset across the Hudson and the string of homeward-bound automobiles on the broad parkway. Suddenly a huge black touring-car marked with big letters, "P. D. N. Y.," shot past.

"Joy-riding again in one of the city's cars," I remarked. "I thought the last Police Department shake-up had put a stop to that."

"Perhaps it has," returned Kennedy. "Did you see who was in the car?"

"No, but I see it has turned and is coming back."

"It was Inspector—I mean, First Deputy O'Connor. I thought he recognized us as he whizzed along, and I guess he did, too. Ah, congratulations, O'Connor! I haven't had a chance to tell you before how pleased I was to learn you had been appointed first deputy. It ought to have been commissioner, though," added Kennedy.

"Congratulations nothing," rejoined O'Connor. "Just another new deal—election coming on, mayor must make a show of getting some reform done, and all that sort of thing. So he began with the Police Department, and here I am, first deputy. But, say, Kennedy," he added, dropping his voice, "I've a little job on my mind that I'd like to pull off in about as spectacular a fashion as I—as you know how. I want to make good, conspicuously good, at the start—understand? Maybe I'll be 'broke' for it and sent to pounding the pavements of Dismissalville, but I don't care, I'll take a chance.

On the level, Kennedy, it's a big thing, and it ought to be done. Will you help me put it across?"

"What is it?" asked Kennedy with a twinkle in his eye at O'Connor's estimate of the security of his tenure of office.

O'Connor drew us away from the automobile toward the stone parapet overlooking the railroad and river far below, and out of earshot of the department chauffeur. "I want to pull off a successful raid on the Vesper Club," he whispered earnestly, scanning our faces.

"Good heavens, man," I ejaculated, "don't you know that Senator Danfield is interested in—"

"Jameson," interrupted O'Connor reproachfully, "I said 'on the level' a few moments ago, and I meant it. Senator Danfield be—well, anyhow, if I don't do it the district attorney will, with the aid of the Dowling law, and I am going to beat him to it, that's all. There's too much money being lost at the Vesper Club, anyhow. It won't hurt Danfield to be taught a lesson not to run such a phony game. I may like to put up a quiet bet myself on the ponies now and then —I won't say I don't, but this thing of Danfield's has got beyond all reason. It's the crookedest gambling joint in the city, at least judging by the stories they tell of losses there. And so beastly aristocratic, too. Read that."

O'Connor shoved a letter into Kennedy's hand, a dainty perfumed and monogramed little missive addressed in a feminine hand. It was such a letter as comes by the thousand to the police in the course of a year, though seldom from ladies of the smart set:

Dear Sir: I notice in the newspapers this morning that you have just been appointed first deputy commissioner of police and that you have been ordered to suppress gambling in New York. For the love that you must still bear toward your own mother, listen to the story of a mother worn with anxiety for her only son, and if there is any justice or righteousness in this great city close up a gambling hell that is sending to ruin scores of our finest young men. No doubt you know or have heard of my family—the DeLongs are not unknown in New York. Perhaps you have also heard of the losses of my son Percival at the Vesper Club. They are fast becoming the common talk of our set. I am not rich, Mr. Commissioner, in spite of our social position, but I am human, as human as a mother in any station of life, and oh, if there is any way, close up that gilded society resort that is dissipating our small fortune, ruining an only son, and slowly bringing to the grave a gray-haired widow, as worthy of protection as any mother of the poor whose plea has closed up a little poolroom or low policy shop.

Sincerely,
(Mrs.) JULIA M. DELONG.

P. S.—Please keep this confidential—at least from my son Percival.

J. M. DEL.

"Well," said Kennedy, as he handed back the letter, "O'Connor, if you do it, I'll take back all the hard things I've ever said about the police system. Young DeLong was in one of my classes at the university, until he was expelled for that last mad prank of his. There's more to that boy than most people think, but he's the wildest scion of wealth I have ever come in contact with. How are you going to pull off your raid—is it to be down through the skylight or up from the cellar?"

"Kennedy," replied O'Connor in the same reproachful tone with which he had addressed me, "talk sense. I'm in earnest. You know the Vesper Club is barred and barricaded like the National City Bank. It isn't one of those common gambling joints which depend for protection on what we call 'ice-box doors.' It's proof against all the old methods. Axes and sledge-hammers would make no impression there."

"Your predecessor had some success at opening doors with a hydraulic jack, I believe, in some very difficult raids," put in Kennedy.

"A hydraulic jack wouldn't do for the Vesper Club, I'm afraid," remarked O'Connor wearily. "Why, sir, that place has been proved bomb-proof—bomb-proof, sir. You remember recently the so-called 'gamblers' war' in which some rivals exploded a bomb on the steps? It did more damage to the house next door than to the club. However, I can get past the outer door, I think, even if it is strong. But inside

—you must have heard of it—is the famous steel door, three inches thick, made of armor-plate. It's no use to try it at all unless we can pass that door with reasonable quickness. All the evidence we shall get will be of an innocent social club-room down-stairs. The gambling is all on the second floor, beyond this door, in a room without a window in it. Surely you've heard of that famous gambling-room, with its perfect system of artificial ventilation and electric lighting that makes it rival noonday at midnight. And don't tell me I've got to get on the other side of the door by strategy, either. It is strategy-proof. The system of lookouts is perfect. No, force is necessary, but it must not be destructive of life or property—or, by heaven, I'd drive up there and riddle the place with a fourteen-inch gun," exclaimed O'Connor.

"H'm!" mused Kennedy as he flicked the ashes off his cigar and meditatively watched a passing freight-train on the railroad below us. "There goes a car loaded with tons and tons of scrap-iron. You want me to scrap that three-inch steel door, do you?"

"Kennedy, I'll buy that particular scrap from you at—almost its weight in gold. The fact is, I have a secret fund at my disposal such as former commissioners have asked for in vain. I can afford to pay you well, as well as any private client, and I hear you have had some good fees lately. Only deliver the goods."

"No," answered Kennedy, rather piqued, "it isn't money that I am after. I merely wanted to be sure that you are in earnest. I can get you past that door as if it were made of green baize."

It was O'Connor's turn to look incredulous, but as Kennedy apparently meant exactly what he said, he simply asked, "And will you?"

"I will do it to-night if you say so," replied Kennedy quietly. "Are you ready?"

For answer O'Connor simply grasped Craig's hand, as if to seal the compact.

"All right, then," continued Kennedy. "Send a furniture-van, one of those closed vans that the storage warehouses use, up to my laboratory any time before seven o'clock. How many men will you need in the raid? Twelve? Will a van hold that many comfortably? I'll want to put some apparatus in it, but that won't take much room."

"Why, yes, I think so," answered O'Connor. "I'll get a well-padded van so that they won't be badly jolted by the ride down-town. By George! Kennedy, I see you know more of that side of police strategy than I gave you credit for."

"Then have the men drop into my laboratory singly about the same time. You can arrange that so that it will not look suspicious, so far up-town. It will be dark, anyhow. Perhaps, O'Connor, you can make up as the driver yourself—anyhow, get one you can trust absolutely. Then have the van down near the corner of Broadway below the club, driving slowly along about the time the theatre crowd is out. Leave the rest to me. I will give you or the driver orders when the time comes."

As O'Connor thanked Craig, he remarked without a shade of insincerity, "Kennedy, talk about being commissioner, you ought to be commissioner."

"Wait till I deliver the goods," answered Craig simply. "I may fall down and bring you nothing but a lawsuit for damages for unlawful entry or unjust persecution, or whatever they call it."

"I'll take a chance at that," called back O'Connor as he jumped into his car and directed, "Headquarters, quick."

As the car disappeared, Kennedy filled his lungs with air as if reluctant to leave the drive. "Our constitutional," he remarked, "is abruptly at an end, Walter."

Then he laughed, as he looked about him.

"What a place in which to plot a raid on Danfield's Vesper Club! Why, the nurse-maids have hardly got the children all in for supper and bed. It's incongruous. Well, I must go over to the laboratory and get some things ready to put in that van with the men. Meet me about half-past seven, Walter, up in the room, all togged up. We'll dine at the Café Riviera to-night in style. And, by the way, you're quite a man about town—you must know someone who can introduce us into the Vesper Club."

"But, Craig," I demurred, "if there is any rough work as a result, it might queer me with them. They might object to being used—"

"Oh, that will be all right. I just want to look the place over and lose a few chips in a good cause. No, it won't queer any of your *Star* connections. We'll be on the outside when the time comes for anything to happen. In fact I shouldn't wonder if your story would make you all the more solid with the sports. I take all the responsibility; you can have the glory. You know they like to hear the inside gossip of such things, after the event. Try it. Remember, at seven-thirty. We'll be a little late at dinner, but never mind; it will be early enough for the club."

Left to my own devices I determined to do a little detective work on my own account, and not only did I succeed in finding an acquaintance who agreed to introduce us at the Vesper Club that night about nine o'clock, but I also learned that Percival DeLong was certain to be there that night, too. I was necessarily vague about Kennedy, for fear my friend might have heard of some of his exploits, but fortunately he did not prove inquisitive.

I hurried back to our apartment and was in the process of transforming myself into a full-fledged boulevardier, when Kennedy arrived in an extremely cheerful frame of mind. So far, his preparations had progressed very favorably, I guessed, and I was quite elated when he complimented me on what I had accomplished in the meantime.

"Pretty tough for the fellows who are condemned to ride around in that van for four mortal hours, though," he said as he hurried into his evening clothes, "but they won't be riding all the time. The driver will make frequent stops."

I was so busy that I paid little attention to him until he had nearly completed his toilet. I gave a gasp.

"Why, whatever are you doing?" I exclaimed as I glanced into his room.

There stood Kennedy arrayed in all the glory of a sharp-pointed moustache and a goatee. He had put on evening clothes of decidedly Parisian cut, clothes which he had used abroad and had brought back with him, but which I had never known him to wear since he came back. On a chair reposed a chimney-pot hat that would have been pronounced faultless on the "continong," but was unknown, except among impresarios, on Broadway.

Kennedy shrugged his shoulders—he even had the shrug.

"Figure to yourself, monsieur," he said. "Ze great Kennedy, ze detectif Américain—to put it tersely in our own vernacular, wouldn't it be a fool thing for me to appear at the Vesper Club where I should surely be recognized by someone if I went in my ordinary clothes and features? *Un faux pas,* at the start? *Jamais!*"

There was nothing to do but agree, and I was glad that I had been discreetly reticent about my companion in talking with the friend who was to gain us entrance to the Avernus beyond the steel door.

We met my friend at the Riviera and dined sumptuously. Fortunately he seemed decidedly impressed with my friend Monsieur Kay—I could do no better on the spur of the moment than take Kennedy's initial, which seemed to serve. We progressed amicably from oysters and soup down to coffee, cigars, and liqueurs, and I succeeded in swallowing Kennedy's tales of Monte Carlo and Ostend and Ascot without even a smile. He must have heard them somewhere, and treasured them up for just such an occasion, but he told them in a manner that was verisimilitude itself, using perfect English with just the trace of an accent at the right places.

At last it was time to saunter around to the Vesper Club without seeming to be too indecently early. The theatres were not yet out, but my friend said play was just beginning at the club and would soon be in full swing.

I had a keen sense of wickedness as we mounted the steps in the yellow flare of the flaming arc-light on the Broadway corner not far below us. A heavy, grated door swung open at the practised signal of my friend, and an obsequious negro servant stood bowing and pronouncing his name in the sombre mahogany portal beyond, with its green marble pillars and handsome decorations. A short parley followed, after which we entered, my friend having apparently satisfied someone that we were all right.

We did not stop to examine the first floor, which doubtless was innocent enough, but turned quickly up a flight of steps. At the foot of the broad staircase Kennedy paused to examine some rich carvings, and I felt him nudge me. I turned. It was an enclosed staircase, with walls that looked to be of re-enforced concrete. Swung back on hinges concealed like those of a modern burglar-proof safe was the famous steel door.

We did not wish to appear to be too interested, yet a certain amount of curiosity was only proper.

My friend paused on the steps, turned, and came back.

"You're perfectly safe," he smiled, tapping the door with his cane with a sort of affectionate respect. "It would take the police ages to get past that barrier, which would be swung shut and bolted the moment the lookout gave the alarm. But there has never been any trouble. The police know that it is so far, no farther. Besides," he added with a wink to me, "you know, Senator Danfield wouldn't like this pretty little door even scratched. Come up, I think I hear DeLong's voice up-stairs. You've heard of him, monsieur? It's said his luck has changed. I'm anxious to find out."

Quickly he led the way up the handsome staircase and into a large, lofty, richly furnished room. Everywhere there were thick, heavy carpets on the floors, into which your feet sank with an air of satisfying luxury.

The room into which we entered was indeed absolutely windowless. It was a room built within the original room of the old house. Thus the windows overlooking the street from the second floor in reality bore no relation to it. For light it depended on a complete oval of lights overhead so arranged as to be themselves invisible, but shining through richly stained glass and conveying the illusion of a slightly clouded noon-day. The absence of windows was made up for, as I learned later, by a ventilating device so perfect that, although everyone was smoking, a most fastidious person could scarcely have been offended by the odor of tobacco.

Of course I did not notice all this at first. What I did notice, however, was a faro-layout and a hazard-board, but as no one was playing at either, my eye quickly traveled to a roulette-table which stretched along the middle of the room. Some ten or a dozen men in evening clothes were gathered watching with intent faces the spinning wheel. There was no money on the table, nothing but piles of chips of various denominations. Another thing that surprised me as I looked was that the tense look on the faces of the players was anything but the feverish, haggard gaze I had expected. In fact, they were sleek, well-fed, typical prosperous New-Yorkers rather inclined to the noticeable in dress and carrying their avoirdupois as if life was an easy game with them. Most of them evidently belonged to the financial and society classes. There were no tragedies; the tragedies were elsewhere—in their offices, homes, in the courts, anywhere, but not here at the club. Here all was life, light, and laughter.

For the benefit of those not acquainted with the roulette-wheel—and I may as well confess that most of my own knowledge was gained in that one crowded evening—I may say that it consists, briefly, of a wooden disc very nicely balanced and turning in the center of a cavity set into a table like a circular wash-basin, with an outer rim turned slightly inward. The "croupier" revolves the wheel to the right. With a quick motion of his middle finger he flicks a marble, usually of ivory, to the left. At the Vesper Club, always up-to-date, the ball was of platinum, not of ivory. The disc with its sloping sides is provided with a number of brass rods, some perpendicular, some horizontal. As the ball and the wheel lose momentum the ball strikes against the rods and finally is deflected into one of the many little pockets or stalls facing the rim of the wheel.

There are thirty-eight of these pockets; two are marked "O" and "OO," the other numbered from one to thirty-six in an irregular and confusing order and painted alternately red and black. At each end of the table are thirty-six large squares correspondingly numbered and colored. The "O" and "OO" are of a neutral color. Whenever the ball falls in the "O" or "OO" the bank takes the stakes, or sweeps the board. The Monte Carlo wheel has only one "O," while the typical American has two, and the Chinese has four.

To one like myself who had read of the Continental gambling-houses with the clink of gold pieces on the table, and the croupier with his wooden rake noisily raking in the winnings of the bank, the comparative silence of the American game comes as a surprise.

As we advanced, we heard only the rattle of the ball, the click of the chips, and the monotonous tone of the spinner: "Twenty-three, black. Eight, red. Seventeen, black." It was almost like the boys in a broker's office calling off the quotations of the ticker and marking them up on the board.

Leaning forward, almost oblivious to the rest, was Percival DeLong, a tall, lithe, handsome young man, whose boyish face ill comported with the marks of dissipation clearly outlined on it. Such a boy, it flashed across my mind, ought to be studying the possible plays of football of an evening in the field-house after his dinner at the training-table, rather than the possible gyrations of the little platinum ball on the wheel.

"Curse the luck!" he exclaimed, as "17" appeared again.

A Hebrew banker staked a pile of chips on the "17" to come up a third time. A murmur of applause at his nerve ran through the circle. DeLong hesitated, as one who thought, "Seventeen has come out twice—the odds against its coming again are too great, even though the winnings would be fabulous, for a good stake." He placed his next bet on another number.

"He's playing Lord Rosslyn's system, to-night," whispered my friend.

The wheel spun, the ball rolled, and the croupier called again, "Seventeen, black." A tremor of excitement ran through the crowd. It was almost unprecedented.

DeLong, with a stiffed oath, leaned back and scanned the faces about the table.

"And '17' has precisely the same chance of turning up in the next spin as if it had not already had a run of three," said a voice at my elbow.

It was Kennedy. The roulette-table needs no introduction when curious sequences are afoot. All are friends.

"That's the theory of Sir Hiram Maxim," commented my friend, as he excused himself reluctantly for another appointment. "But no true gambler will believe it, monsieur, or at least act on it."

All eyes were turned on Kennedy, who made a gesture of polite deprecation, as if the remark of my friend were true, but—he nonchalantly placed his chips on the "17."

"The odds against '17' appearing four consecutive times are some millions," he went on, "and yet, having appeared three times, it is just as likely to appear again as before. It is the usual practice to avoid a number that has had a run, on the theory that some other number is more likely to come up than it is. That would be the case if it were drawing balls from a bag full of red and black balls—the more red ones drawn the smaller the chance of drawing another red one. But if the balls are put back in the bag after being drawn the chances of drawing a red one after three have been drawn are exactly the same as ever. If we toss a cent and heads appear twelve times, that does not have the slightest effect on the thirteenth toss —there is still an even chance that it, too, will be heads. So if '17' had come up five times to-night, it would be just as likely to come the sixth as if the previous five had not occurred, and that despite the fact that before it had appeared at all odds against a run of the same number six times in succession are about two billion, four hundred and ninety-six million, and some thousands. Most systems are based on the old persistent belief that occurrences of chance are affected in some way by occurrences immediately preceding, but disconnected physically. If we've had a run of black for twenty times, system says play the red for the twenty-first. But black is just as likely to turn up the twenty-first as if it were the first play of all. The confusion arises because a run of twenty on the black should happen once in one million, forty-eight thousand, five hundred and seventy-six coups. It would take ten years to make that many coups, and the run of twenty might occur once or any number of times in it. It is only when one deals with infinitely large numbers of coups that one can count on infinitely small variations in the mathematical results. This game does not go on for infinity—therefore anything, everything, may happen. Systems are based on the infinite; we play in the finite."

"You talk like a professor I had at the university," ejaculated DeLong contemptuously as Craig finished his disquisition on the practical fallibility of theoretically infallible systems. Again DeLong carefully avoided the "17," as well as the black.

The wheel spun again; the ball rolled. The knot of spectators around the table watched with bated breath.

Seventeen won!

As Kennedy piled up his winnings superciliously, without even the appearance of triumph, a man behind me whispered, "A foreign nobleman with a system—watch him."

"*Non,* monsieur," said Kennedy quickly, having overheard the remark, "no system, sir. There is only one system of which I know."

"What?" asked DeLong eagerly.

Kennedy staked a large sum on the red to win. The black came up, and he lost. He doubled the stake and played again, and again lost. With amazing calmness Craig kept right on doubling.

"The martingale," I heard the men whisper behind me. "In other words, double or quit."

Kennedy was now in for some hundreds, a sum that was sufficiently large for him, but he doubled again, still cheerfully playing the red, and the red won. As he gathered up his chips he rose.

"That's the only system," he said simply.

"But, go on, go on," came the chorus from about the table.

"No," said Kennedy quietly, "that is part of the system, too—to quit when you have won back your stakes and a little more."

"Huh!" exclaimed DeLong in disgust. "Suppose you were in for some thousands—you wouldn't quit. If you had real sporting blood you wouldn't quit, anyhow!"

Kennedy calmly passed over the open insult, letting it be understood that he ignored this beardless youth.

"There is no way you can beat the game in the long run if you keep at it," he answered simply. "It is mathematically impossible. Consider. We are Crœsuses—we hire players to stake money for us on every possible number at every coup. How do we come out? If there are no 'O' or 'OO,' we come out after each coup precisely where we started—we are paying our own money back and forth among ourselves; we have neither more nor less. But with the 'O' and 'OO' the bank sweeps the board every so often. It is only a question of time when, after paying our money back and forth among ourselves, it has all filtered through the 'O' and 'OO' into the bank. It is not a game of chance for the bank—ah, it is exact, mathematical—*c'est une question d'arithmétique seulement, n'est-ce pas, messieurs?*"

"Perhaps," admitted DeLong, "but it doesn't explain why I am losing to-night while everyone else is winning."

"We are not winning," persisted Craig. "After I have had a bite to eat I will demonstrate how to lose—by keeping on playing." He led the way to the café.

DeLong was too intent on the game to leave, even for refreshments. Now and then I saw him beckon to an attendant, who brought him a stiff drink of whiskey. For a moment his play seemed a little better, then he would drop back into his hopeless losing. For some reason or other his "system" failed absolutely.

"You see, he is hopeless," mused Kennedy over our light repast. "And yet of all gambling games roulette offers the player the best odds, far better than horse-racing, for instance. Our method has usually been to outlaw roulette and permit horse-racing; in other words, suppress the more favorable and permit the less favorable. However, we're doing better now; we're suppressing both. Of course what I say applies only to roulette when it is honestly played—DeLong would lose anyhow, I fear."

I started at Kennedy's tone and whispered hastily: "What do you mean? Do you think the wheel is crooked?"

"I haven't a doubt of it," he replied in an undertone. "That run of '17' *might* happen—yes. But it is improbable. They let me win because I was a new player—new players always win at first. It is proverbial, but the man who is running this game has made it look like a platitude. To satisfy myself on that point I am going to play again—until I have lost my winnings and am just square with the game. When I reach the point that I am convinced that some crooked work is going on I am going to try a little experiment, Walter. I want you to stand close to me so that no one can see what I am doing. Do just as I will indicate to you."

The gambling-room was now fast filling up with the first of the theatre crowd. DeLong's table was the centre of attraction, owing to the high play. A group of young men of his set were commiserating with him on his luck and discussing it with the finished air of roués of double their ages. He was doggedly following his system.

Kennedy and I approached.

"Ah, here is the philosophical stranger again," DeLong exclaimed, catching sight of Kennedy. "Perhaps he can enlighten us on how to win at roulette by playing his own system."

"*Au contraire,* monsieur, let me demonstrate how to lose," answered Craig with a smile that showed a row of faultless teeth beneath his black moustache, decidedly foreign.

Kennedy played and lost, and lost again; then he won, but in the main he lost. After one particularly large loss I felt his arm on mine, drawing me closely to him. DeLong had taken a sort of grim pleasure in the fact that Kennedy, too, was losing. I found that Craig had paused in his play at a moment when DeLong had staked a large sum that a number below "18" would turn up—for five plays the numbers had been between "18" and "36." Curious to see what Craig was doing, I looked cautiously down between us. All eyes were fixed on the wheel. Kennedy was holding an ordinary compass in the crooked-up palm of his hand. The needle pointed at me, as I happened to be standing north of it.

The wheel spun. Suddenly the needle swung around to a point between the north and south poles, quivered a moment, and came to rest in that position. Then it swung back to the north.

It was some seconds before I realized the significance of it. It had pointed at the table—and DeLong had lost again. There was some electric attachment at work.

Kennedy and I exchanged glances, and he shoved the compass into my hand quickly. "You watch it, Walter, while I play," he whispered.

Carefully concealing it, as he had done, yet holding it as close to the table as I dared I tried to follow two things at once without betraying myself. As near as I could make out, something happened at every play. I would not go so far as to assert that whenever the large stakes were on a certain number the needle pointed to the opposite side of the wheel, for it was impossible to be at all accurate about it. Once I noticed the needle did not move at all, and he won. But on the next play he staked what I knew must be the remainder of his winnings on what seemed a very good chance. Even before the wheel was revolved and the ball set rolling, the needle swung about, and when the platinum ball came to rest Kennedy rose from the table, a loser.

"By George, though," exclaimed DeLong, grasping his hand. "I take it all back. You are a good loser, sir. I wish I could take it as well as you do. But then, I'm in too deeply. There are too many 'markers' with the house up against me."

Senator Danfield had just come in to see how things were going. He was a sleek, fat man, and it was amazing to see with what deference his victims treated him. He affected not to have heard what DeLong said, but I could imagine what he was thinking, for I had heard that he had scant sympathy with anyone after he "went broke"—another evidence of the camaraderie and good-fellowship that surrounded the game.

Kennedy's next remark surprised me. "Oh, your luck will change, D. L.,"—everyone referred to him as "D. L.," for gambling-houses have an aversion for real names and greatly prefer initials—"your luck will change presently. Keep right on with your system. It's the best you can do to-night, short of quitting."

"I'll never quit." replied the young man under his breath.

Meanwhile Kennedy and I paused on the way out to compare notes. My report of the behavior of the compass only confirmed him in his opinion.

As we turned to the stairs we took in a full view of the room.

A faro-layout was purchasing Senator Danfield a new touring-car every hour at the expense of the players. Another group was gathered about the hazard-board, deriving evident excitement, though I am sure none could have given an intelligent account of the chances they were taking. Two roulette-tables were now going full blast, the larger crowd still about DeLong's. Snatches of conversation came to us now and then, and I caught one sentence, "DeLong's in for over a hundred thousand now on the week's play, I understand; poor boy—that about cleans him up."

"The tragedy of it, Craig," I whispered, but he did not hear.

With his hat tilted at a rakish angle and his opera-coat over his arm he sauntered over for a last look.

"Any luck yet?" he asked carelessly.

"The devil—no," returned the boy.

"Do you know what my advice to you is, the advice of a man who has seen high play everywhere from Monte Carlo to Shanghai?"

"What?"

"Play until your luck changes if it takes until to-morrow."

A supercilious smile crossed Senator Danfield's fat face.

"I intend to," and the haggard young face turned again to the table and forgot us.

"For Heaven's sake, Kennedy," I gasped as we went down the stairway, "what do you mean by giving him such advice—you?"

"Not so loud, Walter. He'd have done it anyhow, I suppose, but I want him to keep at it. This night means life or death to Percival DeLong and his mother, too. Come on, let's get out of this."

We passed the formidable steel door and gained the street, jostled by the late-comers who had left the after-theatre restaurants for a few moments of play at the famous club that so long had defied the police.

Almost gaily Kennedy swung along toward Broadway. At the corner he hesitated, glanced up and down, caught sight of the furniture-van in the middle of the next block. The driver was tugging at the harness of the horses, apparently fixing it. We walked along and stopped beside it.

"Drive around in front of the Vesper Club slowly," said Kennedy as the driver at last looked up.

The van lumbered ahead, and we followed it casually. Around the corner it turned. We turned also. My heart was going like a sledge-hammer as the critical moment approached. My head was in a whirl. What would that gay throng back of those darkened windows down the street think if they knew what was being prepared for them?

On, like the Trojan horse, the van lumbered. A man went into the Vesper Club, and I saw the negro at the door eye the oncoming van suspiciously. The door banged shut.

The next thing I knew, Kennedy had ripped off his disguise, had flung himself up behind the van, and had swung the doors open. A dozen men with axes and sledgehammers swarmed out and up the steps of the club.

"Call the reserves, O'Connor," cried Kennedy. "Watch the roof and the back yard."

The driver of the van hastened to send in the call.

The sharp raps of the hammers and the axes sounded on the thick brass-bound oak of the out-side door in quick succession. There was a scurry of feet inside, and we could hear a grating noise and a terrific jar as the inner, steel door shut.

"A raid! A raid on the Vesper Club!" shouted a belated passer-by. The crowd swarmed around from Broadway, as if it were noon instead of midnight.

Banging and ripping and tearing, the outer door was slowly forced. As it crashed in, the quick gongs of several police patrols sounded. The reserves had been called out at the proper moment, too late for them to "tip off" the club that there was going to be a raid, as frequently occurs.

Disregarding the mêlée behind me, I leaped through the wreckage with the other raiders. The steel door barred all further progress with its cold blue impassibility. How were we to surmount this last and most formidable barrier?

I turned in time to see Kennedy and O'Connor hurrying up the steps with a huge tank studded with bolts like a boiler, while two other men carried a second tank.

"There," ordered Craig, "set the oxygen there," as he placed his own tank on the opposite side.

Out of the tanks stout tubes led, with stop-cocks and gages at the top. From a case under his arm Kennedy produced a curious arrangement like a huge hook, with a curved neck and a sharp beak. Really it consisted of two metal tubes which ran into a sort of cylinder, or mixing chamber, above the nozzle, while parallel to them ran a third separate tube with a second nozzle of its own. Quickly he joined the ends of the tubes from the tanks to the metal hook, the oxygen-tank being joined to two of the tubes of the hook, and the second tank being joined to the other. With a match he touched the nozzle gingerly. Instantly a hissing, spitting noise followed, and an intense blinding needle of flame.

"Now for the oxy-acetylene blowpipe," cried Kennedy as he advanced toward the steel door. "We'll make short work of this."

Almost as he said it, the steel beneath the blowpipe became incandescent.

Just to test it, he cut off the head of a three-quarter-inch steel rivet—taking about a quarter of a minute to do it. It was evident, though, that that would not weaken the door appreciably, even if the rivets were all driven through. Still they gave a starting-point for the flame of the high-pressure acetylene torch.

It was a brilliant sight. The terrific heat from the first nozzle caused the metal to glow under the torch as if in an open-hearth furnace. From the second nozzle issued a stream of oxygen under which the hot metal of the door was completely consumed. The force of the blast as the compressed oxygen and acetylene were expelled carried a fine spray and the disintegrated metal visibly before it. And yet it was not a big hole that it made—scarcely an eighth of an inch wide, but clear and sharp as if a buzz saw were eating its way through a three-inch plank of white pine. With tense muscles Kennedy held this terrific engine of destruction and moved it as easily as if it had been a mere pencil of light. He was easily the calmest of us all as we crowded about him at a respectful distance.

"Acetylene, as you may know," he hastily explained, never pausing for a moment in his work, "is composed of carbon and hydrogen. As it burns at the end of the nozzle it is broken into carbon and hydrogen—the carbon gives the high temperature, and the hydrogen forms a cone that protects the end of the blowpipe from being itself burnt up."

"But isn't it dangerous?" I asked, amazed at the skill with which he handled the blowpipe.

"Not particularly—when you know how to do it. In that tank is a porous asbestos packing saturated with acetone, under pressure. Thus I can carry acetylene safely, for it is dissolved, and the possibility of explosion is minimized. This mixing chamber by which I am holding the torch, where the oxygen and acetylene mix, is also designed in such a way as to prevent a flash-back. The best thing about this style of blowpipe is the ease with which it can be transported and the curious uses—like the present—to which it can be put."

He paused a moment to test the door. All was silence on the other side. The door itself was as firm as ever.

"Huh!" exclaimed one of the detectives behind me, "these new-fangled things ain't all they're cracked up to be. Now if I was runnin' this show, I'd dynamite that door to kingdom come."

"And wreck the house and kill a few people," I returned, hotly resenting the criticism of Kennedy. Kennedy affected not to hear.

"When I shut off the oxygen in this second jet," he resumed as if nothing had been said, "you see the torch merely heats the steel. I can get a heat of approximately sixty-three hundred degrees Fahrenheit, and the flame will exert a pressure of fifty pounds to the square inch."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed O'Connor, who had not heard the remark of his subordinate and was watching with undisguised admiration. "Kennedy, how did you ever think of such a thing?"

"Why, it's used for welding, you know," answered Craig as he continued to work calmly in the growing excitement. "I first saw it in actual use in mending a cracked cylinder in an automobile. The cylinder was repaired without being taken out at all. I've seen it weld new teeth and build up old worn teeth on gearing, as good as new."

He paused to let us see the terrifically heated metal under the flame.

"You remember when we were talking on the drive about the raid, O'Connor? A car-load of scrap-iron went by on the railroad below us. They use this blowpipe to cut it up, frequently. That's what gave me the idea. See. I turn on the oxygen now in this second nozzle. The blowpipe is no longer an instrument for joining metals together, but for cutting them asunder. The steel burns just as you, perhaps, have seen a watch-spring burn in a jar of oxygen. Steel, hard or soft, tempered, annealed, chrome, or Harveyized, it all burns just as fast and just as easily. And it's cheap too. This raid may cost a couple of dollars, as far as the blowpipe is concerned—quite a difference from the thousands of dollars' loss that would follow an attempt to blow the door in.

The last remark was directed quietly at the doubting detective. He had nothing to say. We stood in awe-struck amazement as the torch slowly, inexorably, traced a thin line along the edge of the door.

Minute after minute sped by, as the line burned by the blowpipe cut straight from top to bottom. It seemed hours to me. Was Kennedy going to slit the whole door and let it fall in with a crash?

No, I could see that even in his cursory examination of the door he had gained a pretty good knowledge of the location of the bolts imbedded in the steel. One after another he was cutting clear through and severing them, as if with a superhuman knife.

What was going on on the other side of the door, I wondered. I could scarcely imagine the consternation of the gamblers caught in their own trap.

With a quick motion Kennedy turned off the acetylene and oxygen. The last bolt had been severed. A gentle push of the hand, and he swung the once impregnable door on its delicately poised hinges as easily as if he had merely said, "Open Sesame." The robbers' cave yawned before us.

We made a rush up the stairs. Kennedy was first, O'Connor next, and myself scarcely a step behond, with the rest of O'Connor's men at our heels.

I think we were all prepared for some sort of gun-play, for the crooks were desperate characters, and I myself was surprised to encounter nothing but physical force, which was quickly overcome.

In the now disordered richness of the rooms, waving his "John Doe" warrant in one hand and his pistol in the other, O'Connor shouted: "You're all under arrest, gentlemen. If you resist further it will go hard with you."

Crowded now in one end of the room in speechless amazement was the late gay party of gamblers, including Senator Danfield himself. They had reckoned on toying with any chance but this. The pale white face of DeLong among them was like a spectre, as he stood staring blankly about and still insanely twisting the roulette wheel before him.

Kennedy advanced toward the table with an ax which he had seized from one of our men. A well-directed blow shattered the mechanism of the delicate wheel.

"DeLong," he said, "I'm not going to talk to you like your old professor at the university, nor like your recent friend, the Frenchman with a system. This is what you have been up against, my boy. Look."

His forefinger indicated an ingenious, but now tangled and twisted, series of minute wires and electro-magnets in the broken wheel before us. Delicate brushes led the current into the wheel. With another blow of his axe, Craig disclosed wires running down through the leg of the table to the floor and under the carpet to buttons operated by the man who ran the game.

"Wh-what does it mean?" asked DeLong blankly.

"It means that you had little enough chance to win at a straight game of roulette. But the wheel is very rarely straight, even with all the odds in favor of the bank, as they are. This game was electrically controlled. Others are mechanically controlled by what is sometimes called the 'mule's ear,' and other devices. You *can't* win. There wires and magnets can be made to attract the little ball into any pocket the operator desires. Each one of those pockets contains a little electro-magnet. One set of magnets in the red pockets is connected with one button under the carpet and a battery. The other set in the black pockets is connected with another button and the battery. This ball is not really of platinum. Platinum is non-magnetic. It is simply a soft iron hollow ball, plated with platinum. Whichever set of electro-magnets is energized attracts the ball and by this simple method it is in the power of the operator to let the ball go to red or black as he may wish. Other similar arrangements control the odd or even, and other combinations from other push buttons. A special arrangement took care of that '17' freak. There isn't an honest gambling-machine in the whole place—I might almost say the whole city. The whole thing is crooked from start to finish—the men, the machines—the—"

"That machine could be made to beat me by turning up a run of '17' any number of times, or red or black, or odd or even, over '18' or under '18,' or anything?"

"Anything, DeLong."

"And I never had a chance," he repeated, meditatively fingering the wires. "They broke me to-night. Danfield" —DeLong turned, looking dazedly about in the crowd for his former friend, then his hand shot into his pocket, and a little ivory-handled pistol flashed out—"Danfield, your blood is on your own head. You have ruined me."

Kennedy must have been expecting something of the sort, for he seized the arm of the young man, weakened by dissipation, and turned the pistol upward as if it had been in the grasp of a mere child.

A blinding flash followed in the farthest corner of the room and a huge puff of smoke. Before I could collect my wits another followed in the opposite corner. The room was filled with a dense smoke.

Two men were scuffling at my feet. One was Kennedy. As I dropped down quickly to help him I saw that the other was Danfield, his face purple with the violence of the struggle.

"Don't be alarmed, gentlemen," I heard O'Connor shout, "the explosions were only the flash-lights of the official police photographers. We now have the evidence complete. Gentlemen, you will now go down quietly to the patrol-wagons below, two by two. If you have anything to say, say it to the magistrate of the night court."

"Hold his arms, Walter," panted Kennedy.

I did. With a dexterity that would have done credit to a pickpocket, Kennedy reached into Danfield's pocket and pulled out some papers.

Before the smoke had cleared and order had been restored, Craig exclaimed: "Let him up, Walter. Here, DeLong, here are the I. O. U.'s against you. Tear them up—they are not even a debt of honor."

The Great K. & A. Train Robbery

BY PAUL LEICESTER FORD

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CHAPTER I

THE PARTY ON SPECIAL NO. 218

ANY one who hopes to find in what is here written a work of literature had better lay it aside unread. At Yale I should have got the sack in rhetoric and English composition, let alone other studies, had it not been for the fact that I played half-back on the team, and so the professors marked me away up above where I ought to have ranked. That was twelve years ago, but my life since I received my parchment has hardly been of a kind to improve me in either style or grammar. It is true that one woman tells me I write well, and my directors never find fault with my compositions; but I know that she likes my letters because, whatever else they may say to her, they always say in some form, "I love you," while my board approve my annual reports because thus far I have been able to end each with "I recommend the declaration of a dividend of — per cent from the earnings of the current year." I should therefore prefer to reserve my writings for such friendly critics, if it did not seem necessary to make public a plain statement concerning an affair over which there appears to be much confusion. I have heard in the last five years not less than twenty renderings of what is commonly called "the great K. & A. train robbery,"—some so twisted and distorted that but for the intermediate versions I should never have recognized them as attempts to narrate the series of events in which I played a somewhat prominent part. I have read or been told that, unassisted, the pseudo-hero captured a dozen desperadoes; that he was one of the road agents himself; that he was saved from lynching only by the timely arrival of cavalry; that the action of the United States government in rescuing him from the civil authorities was a most high-handed interference with State rights; that he received his reward from a grateful railroad by being promoted; that a lovely woman as recompense for his villainy—but bother! it's my business to tell what really occurred, and not what the world chooses to invent. And if any man thinks he would have done otherwise in my position, I can only say that he is a better or a worse man than Dick Gordon.

Primarily, it was football which shaped my end. Owing to my skill in the game, I took a post-graduate at the Sheffield Scientific School, that the team might have my services for an extra two years. That led to my knowing a little about mechanical engineering, and when I felt the "quad" for good I went into the Alton Railroad shops. It wasn't long before I was foreman of a section; next I became a division superintendent, and after I had stuck to that for a time I was appointed superintendent of the Kansas & Arizona Railroad, a line extending from Trinidad in Kansas to The Needles in Arizona, tapping the Missouri Western System at the first place, and the Great Southern at the other. With both lines we had important traffic agreements, as well as the closest relations, which sometimes were a little difficult, as the two roads were anything but friendly, and we had directors of each on the K. & A. board, in which they fought like cats. Indeed, it could only be a question of time when one would oust the other and then absorb my road. My head-quarters were at Albuquerque, in New Mexico, and it was there, in October, 1890, that I received the communication which was the beginning of all that followed.

This initial factor was a letter from the president of the Missouri Western, telling me that their first vice-president, Mr. Cullen (who was also a director of my road), was coming out to attend the annual election of the K. & A., which under our charter had to be held in Ash Fork, Arizona. A second paragraph told me that Mr. Cullen's family accompanied him, and that they all wished to visit the Grand Cañon of the

Colorado on their way. Finally the president wrote that the party travelled in his own private car, and asked me to make myself generally useful to them. Having become quite hardened to just such demands, at the proper date I ordered my superintendent's car on to No. 2, and the next morning it was dropped off at Trinidad.

The moment No. 3 arrived, I climbed into the president's special, that was the last car on the train, and introduced myself to Mr. Cullen, whom, though an official of my road, I had never met. He seemed surprised at my presence, but greeted me very pleasantly as soon as I explained that the Missouri Western office had asked me to do what I could for him, and that I was there for that purpose. His party were about to sit down to breakfast, and he asked me to join them: so we passed into the dining-room at the forward end of the car, where I was introduced to "My son," "Lord Ralles," and "Captain Ackland." The son was a junior copy of his father, tall and fine-looking, but, in place of the frank and easy manner of his sire, he was so very English that most people would have sworn falsely as to his native land. Lord Ralles was a little, well-built chap, not half so English as Albert Cullen, quick in manner and thought, being in this the opposite of his brother Captain Ackland, who was heavy enough to rock-ballast a roadbed. Both brothers gave me the impression of being gentlemen, and both were decidedly good-looking.

After the introductions, Mr. Cullen said we would not wait, and his remark called my attention to the fact that there was one more place at the table than there were people assembled. I had barely noted this, when my host said, "Here's the truant," and, turning, I faced a lady who had just entered. Mr. Cullen said, "Madge, let me introduce Mr. Gordon to you." My bow was made to a girl of about twenty, with light brown hair, the bluest of eyes, a fresh skin and a fine figure, dressed so nattily as to be to me after my four years of Western life, a sight for tired eyes. She greeted me pleasantly, made a neat little apology for having kept us waiting, and then we all sat down.

It was a very jolly breakfast-table, Mr. Cullen and his son being capital talkers, and Lord Ralles a good third, while

Miss Cullen was quick and clever enough to match the three. Before the meal was over I came to the conclusion that Lord Ralles was in love with Miss Cullen, for he kept making low asides to her; and from the fact that she allowed them, and indeed responded, I drew the conclusion that he was a lucky beggar, feeling, I confess, a little pang that a title was going to win such a nice American girl.

One of the first subjects spoken of was train-robbery, and Miss Cullen, like most Easterners, seemed to take a great interest in it, and had any quantity of questions to ask me.

"I've left all my jewelry behind, except my watch," she said, "and that I hide every night. So I really hope we'll be held up, it would be such an adventure."

"There isn't any chance of it, Miss Cullen," I told her; "and if we were, you probably wouldn't even know that it was happening, but would sleep right through it."

"Wouldn't they try to get our money and our watches?" she demanded.

I told her no, and explained that the express and mail-cars were the only ones to which the road agents paid any attention. She wanted to know the way it was done: so I described to her how sometimes the train was flagged by a danger signal, and when it had slowed down the runner found himself covered by armed men; or how a gang would board the train, one by one, at way stations, and then, when the time came, steal forward, secure the express agent and postal clerk, climb over the tender, and compel the runner to stop the train at some lonely spot on the road. She made me tell her all the details of such robberies as I knew about, and, though I had never been concerned in any, I was able to describe several, which, as they were monotonously alike, I confess I colored up a bit here and there, in an attempt to make them interesting to her. I seemed to succeed, for she kept the subject going even after we had left the table and were smoking our cigars in the observation saloon. Lord Ralles had a lot to say about the American lack of courage in letting trains containing twenty and thirty men be held up by half a dozen robbers.

"Why," he ejaculated, "my brother and I each have a double express with us, and do you think we'd sit still in our seats? No. Hang me if we wouldn't pot something."

"You might," I laughed, a little nettled, I confess, by his speech, "but I'm afraid it would be yourselves."

"Aw, you fancy resistance impossible?" drawled Albert Cullen.

"It has been tried," I answered, "and without success. You can see it's like all surprises. One side is prepared before the other side knows there is danger. Without regard to relative numbers, the odds are all in favor of the road agents."

"But I wouldn't sit still, whatever the odds," asserted his lordship. "And no Englishman would."

"Well, Lord Ralles," I said, "I hope for your sake, then, that you'll never be in a hold-up, for I should feel about you as the runner of a locomotive did when the old lady asked him if it was'nt very painful to him to run over people. 'Yes, madam,' he sadly replied: 'there is nothing musses an engine up so.' "

I don't think Miss Cullen liked Lord Ralles's comments on American courage any better than I did, for she said—

"Can't you take Lord Ralles and Captain Ackland into the service of the K. & A., Mr. Gordon, as a special guard?"

"The K. & A. has never had a robbery yet, Miss Cullen," I replied, "and I don't think that it ever will have."

"Why not?" she asked.

I explained to her how the Cañon of the Colorado to the north, and the distance of the Mexican border to the south, made escape so almost desperate that the road agents preferred to devote their attentions to other routes. "If we were boarded, Miss Cullen," I said, "your jewelry would be as safe as it is in Chicago, for the robbers would only clean out the express and mail-cars; but if they should so far forget their manners as to take your trinkets, I'd agree to return them to you inside of one week."

"That makes it all the jollier," she cried, eagerly. "We could have the fun of the adventure, and yet not lose anything. Can't you arrange for it, Mr. Gordon?"

"I'd like to please you, Miss Cullen," I said, "and I'd like to give Lord Ralles a chance to show us how to handle those gentry; but it's not to be done." I really should have been glad to have the road agents pay us a call.

We spent that day pulling up the Raton pass, and so on over the Glorietta pass down to Lamy, where, as the party wanted to see Sante Fé, I had our two cars dropped off the overland, and we ran up the branch line to the old Mexican city. It was well-worn ground to me, but I enjoyed showing the sights to Miss Cullen, for by that time I had come to the conclusion that I had never met a sweeter or jollier girl. Her beauty, too, was of a kind that kept growing on one, and before I had known her twenty-four hours, without quite being in love with her, I was beginning to hate Lord Ralles, which was about the same thing, I suppose. Every hour convinced me that the two understood each other, not merely from the little asides and confidences they kept exchanging, but even more so from the way Miss Cullen would take his lordship down occasionally. Yet, like a fool, the more I saw to confirm my first diagnosis, the more I found myself dwelling on the dimples at the corners of Miss Cullen's mouth, the bewitching uplift of her upper lip, the runaway curls about her neck, and the curves and color of her cheeks.

Half a day served to see everything in Santa Fé worth looking at, but Mr. Cullen decided to spend there the time they had to wait for his other son to join the party. To pass the hours, I hunted up some ponies, and we spent three days in long rides up the old Santa Fé trail and to the outlying mountains. Only one incident was other than pleasant, and that was my fault. As we were riding back to our cars on the second afternoon, we had to cross the branch road-bed, where a gang happened to be at work tamping the ties.

"Since you're interested in road agents, Miss Cullen," I said, "you may like to see one. That fellow standing in the ditch is Jack Drute, who was concerned in the D. & R. G. hold-up three years ago."

Miss Cullen looked where I pointed, and seeing a man with a gun, gave a startled jump, and pulled up her pony, evidently supposing that we were about to be attacked. "Sha'n't we run?" she began, but then checked herself, as she took in the facts of the drab clothes of the gang and the two armed men in uniform. "They are convicts?" she asked, and when I nodded, she said, "Poor things!" After a pause, she asked, "How long is he in prison for?"

"Twenty years," I told her."

"How harsh that seems!" she said. "How cruel we are to people for a few moments' wrong-doing, which the circumstances may almost have justified!" She checked her pony as we came opposite Drute, and said, "Can you use money?"

"Can I, lyedy?" said the fellow, leering in an attempt to look amiable. "Wish I had the chance to try."

The guard interrupted by telling her it wasn't permitted to speak to the convicts while out of bounds, and so we had to ride on. All Miss Cullen was able to do was to throw him a little bunch of flowers she had gathered in the mountains. It was literally casting pearls before swine, for the fellow did not seem particularly pleased, and when, late that night, I walked down there with a lantern I found the flowers lying in the ditch. The experience seemed to sadden and distress Miss Cullen very much for the rest of the afternoon, and I kicked myself for having called her attention to the brute, and could have knocked him down for the way he had looked at her. It is curious that I felt thankful at the time that Drute was not holding up a train Miss Cullen was on. It is always the unexpected that happens. If I could have looked into the future, what a strange variation on this thought I should have seen!

The three days went all too quickly, thanks to Miss Cullen, and by the end of that time I began to understand what love really meant to a chap, and how men could come to kill each other for it. For a fairly sensible, hard-headed fellow it was pretty quick work, I acknowledge; but let any man have seven years of Western life without seeing a woman worth speaking of, and then meet Miss Cullen, and if he didn't do as I did, I wouldn't trust him on the tailboard of a locomotive, for I should put him down as defective both in eyesight and in intellect.

CHAPTER II

THE HOLDING-UP OF OVERLAND NO. 3

On the third day a despatch came from Frederic Cullen telling his father he would join us at Lamy on No. 3 that evening. I at once ordered 97 and 218 coupled to the connecting train, and in an hour we were back on the main line.

While waiting for the overland to arrive, Mr. Cullen asked me to do something which, as it later proved to have considerable bearing on the events of that night, is worth mentioning, trivial as it seems. When I had first joined the party, I had given orders for 97 to be kicked in between the main string and their special, so as not to deprive the occupants of 218 of the view from their observation saloon and balcony platform. Mr. Cullen came to me now and asked me to reverse the arrangement and make my car the tail end. I was giving orders for the splitting and kicking in when No. 3 arrived, and thus did not see the greeting of Frederic Cullen and his family. When I joined them, his father told me that the high altitude had knocked his son up so, that he had to be helped from the ordinary sleeper to the special and had gone to bed immediately. Out West we have to know something of medicine, and my car had its chest of drugs: so I took some tablets and went into his state-room. Frederic was like his brother in appearance, though not in manner, having a quick, alert way. He was breathing with such difficulty that I was almost tempted to give him nitroglycerin, instead of strychnine, but he said he would be all right as soon as he became accustomed to the rarefied air, quite pooh-poohing my suggestion that he take No. 2 back to Trinidad; and while I was still urging, the train started. Leaving him the vials of digitalis and strychnine, therefore, I went back, and dined *solus* on my own car, indulging at the end in a cigar, the smoke of which would keep turning into pictures of Miss Cullen. I have thought about those pictures since then, and have concluded that when cigar-smoke behaves like that, a man might as well read his destiny in it, for it can mean only one thing.

After enjoying the combination, I went to No. 218 to have a look at the son, and found that the heart tonics had benefited him considerably. On leaving him, I went to the dining-room, where the rest of the party were still at dinner, to ask that the invalid have a strong cup of coffee, and after delivering my request Mr. Cullen asked me to join them in a cigar. This I did gladly, for a cigar and Miss Cullen's society were even pleasanter than a cigar and Miss Cullen's pictures, because the pictures never quite did her justice, and, besides, didn't talk.

Our smoke finished, we went back to the saloon, where the gentlemen sat down to poker, which Lord Ralles had just learned, and liked. They did not ask me to take a hand, for which I was grateful, as the salary of a railroad superintendent would hardly stand the game they probably played; and I had my compensation when Miss Cullen also was not asked to join them. She said she was going to watch the moonlight on the mountains from the platform, and opened the door to go out, finding for the first time that No. 97 was the "ender." In her disappointment she protested against this and wanted to know the why and wherefore.

"We shall have far less motion, Madge," Mr. Cullen explained, "and then we sha'n't have the rear-end man in our car at night."

"But I don't mind the motion," urged Miss Cullen, "and the flagman is only there after we are all in our rooms. Please leave us the view."

"I prefer the present arrangement, Madge," insisted Mr. Cullen, in a very positive voice.

I was so sorry for Miss Cullen's disappointment that on impulse I said, "The platform of 97 is entirely at your service, Miss Cullen." The moment it was out I realized that I ought not to have said it, and that I deserved a rebuke for supposing she would use my car.

Miss Cullen took it better than I hoped for, and was declining the offer as kindly as my intention had been in making it, when, much to my astonishment, her father interrupted by saying—

"By all means, Madge. That relieves us of the discomfort of being the last car, and yet lets you have the scenery and moonlight."

Miss Cullen looked at her father for a moment as if not believing what she had heard. Lord Ralles scowled and opened his mouth to say something, but checked himself and only flung his discard down as if he hated the cards.

"Thank you, papa," responded Miss Cullen, "but I think I will watch you play."

"Now, Madge, don't be foolish," said Mr. Cullen, irritably. "You might just as well have the pleasure, and you'll only disturb the game if you stay here."

Miss Cullen leaned over and whispered something, and her father answered her. Lord Ralles must have heard, for he muttered something, which made Miss Cullen color up; but much good it did him, for she turned to me and said, "Since my father doesn't disapprove, I will gladly accept your hospitality, Mr. Gordon," and after a glance at Lord Ralles that had a challenging "I'll do as I please" in it, she went to get her hat and coat. The whole incident had not taken ten seconds, yet it puzzled me beyond measure, even while my heart beat with an unreasonable hope; for my better sense told me that it simply meant that Lord Ralles disapproved, and Miss Cullen, like any girl of spirit, was giving him notice that he was not yet privileged to control her actions. Whatever the scene meant, his lordship did not like it, for he swore at his luck the moment Miss Cullen had left the room.

When Miss Cullen returned we went back to the rear platform of 97. I let down the traps, closed the gates, got a camp-stool for her to sit upon, with a cushion to lean back on, and a footstool, and fixed her as comfortably as I could, even getting a traveling-rug to cover her lap, for the plateau air was chilly. Then I hesitated a moment, for I had the feeling that she had not thoroughly approved of the thing and therefore she might not like to have me stay. Yet she was so charming in the moonlight, and the little balcony the platform made was such a tempting spot to linger on, while she was there, that it wasn't easy to go. Finally I asked—

"You are quite comfortable, Miss Cullen?"

"Sinfully so," she laughed.

"Then perhaps you would like to be left to enjoy the moonlight and your meditations by yourself?" I questioned. I knew I ought to have just gone away, but I simply couldn't when she looked so enticing.

"Do you want to go?" she asked.

"No!" I ejaculated, so forcibly that she gave a little startled jump in her chair. "That is—I mean," I stuttered, embarrassed by my own vehemence, "I rather thought you might not want me to stay."

"What made you think that?" she demanded.

I never was a good hand at inventing explanations, and after a moment's seeking for some reason, I plumped out, "Because I feared you might not think it proper to use my car, and I suppose it's my presence that made you think it."

She took my stupid fumble very nicely, laughing merrily while saying, 'If you like mountains and moonlight, Mr. Gordon, and don't mind the lack of a chaperon, get a stool for yourself, too." What was more, she offered me half of the lap-robe when I was seated beside her.

I think she was pleased by my offer to go away, for she talked very pleasantly, and far more intimately than she had ever done before, telling me facts about her family, her Chicago life, her travels, and even her thoughts. From this I learned that her elder brother was an Oxford graduate, and that Lord Ralles and his brother were classmates, who were visiting him for the first time since he had graduated. She asked me some questions about my work, which led me to tell her pretty much everything about myself that I thought could be of the least interest; and it was a very pleasant surprise to me to find that she knew one of the old team, and had even heard of me from him.

"Why," she exclaimed, "how absurd of me not to have thought of it before! But, you see, Mr. Colston always speaks of you by your first name. You ought to hear how he praises you."

"Trust Harry to praise any one," I said. "There were some pretty low fellows on the old team—men who couldn't keep their word or their tempers, and would slug every chance they got; but Harry used to insist there wasn't a bad egg among the lot."

"Don't you find it very lonely to live out here, away from old friends?" she asked.

I had to acknowledge that it was, and told her the worst part was the absence of pleasant women. "Till you arrived, Miss Cullen," I said, "I hadn't seen a well-gowned woman in four years." I've always noticed that a woman would rather have a man notice and praise her frock than her beauty, and Miss Cullen was apparently no exception, for I could see the remark pleased her.

"Don't Western women ever get Eastern gowns?" she asked.

"Any quantity," I said, "but you know, Miss Cullen, that it isn't the gown, but the way it's worn, that gives the artistic touch." For a fellow who had devoted the last seven years of his life to grades and fuel and rebates and pay-rolls, I don't think that was bad. At least it made Miss Cullen's mouth dimple at the corners.

The whole evening was so eminently satisfactory that I almost believe I should be talking yet, if interruption had not come. The first premonition of it was Miss Cullen's giving a little shiver, which made me ask if she was cold.

"Not at all," she replied. "I only—what place are we stopping at?"

I started to rise, but she checked the movement and said, "Don't trouble yourself. I thought you would know without moving. I really don't care to know."

I took out my watch, and was startled to find it was twenty minutes past twelve. I wasn't so green as to tell Miss Cullen so, and merely said, "By the time, this must be Sanders."

"Do we stop long?" she asked.

"Only to take water," I told her, and then went on with what I had been speaking about when she shivered. But as I talked it slowly dawned on me that we had been standing still some time, and presently I stopped speaking and glanced off, expecting to recognize something, only to see alkali plain on both sides. A little surprised, I looked down, to find no siding. Rising hastily, I looked out forward. I could see moving figures on each side of the train, but that meant nothing, as the train's crew, and, for that matter passengers, are very apt to alight at every stop. What did mean something was that there was no water-tank, no station, nor any other visible cause for a stop.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Miss Cullen.

"I think something's wrong with the engine or the road-bed, Miss Cullen," I said, "and, if you'll excuse me a moment, I'll go forward and see."

I had barely spoken when "bang! bang!" went two shots. That they were both fired from an English "express" my ears told me for no other people in this world make a mountain howitzer and call it a rifle.

Hardly were the two shots fired when "crack! crack! crack! crack!" went some Winchesters.

"Oh! what is it?" cried Miss Cullen.

"I think your wish has been granted," I answered hurriedly. "We are being held up, and Lord Ralles is showing us how to—"

My speech was interrupted. "Bang! bang!" challenged another "express," the shots so close together as to be almost simultaneous. "Crack! crack! crack!" retorted the Winchesters, and from the fact that silence followed I drew a clear inference. I said to myself, "That is an end of poor John Bull."

CHAPTER III

A NIGHT'S WORK ON THE ALKALI PLAINS

I hurried Miss Cullen into the car, and, after bolting the rear door, took down my Winchester from its rack.

"I'm going forward," I told her, "and will tell my darkies to bolt the front door: so you'll be as safe in here as in Chicago."

In another minute I was on my front platform. Dropping down between the two cars, I crept along beside—indeed, half under—Mr. Cullen's special. After my previous conclusion, my surprise can be judged when at the farther end I found the two Britishers and Albert Cullen, standing there in the most exposed position possible. I joined them, muttering to myself something about Providence and fools.

"Aw," drawled Cullen, "here's Mr. Gordon, just too late for the sport, by Jove."

"Well," bragged Lord Ralles, "we've had a hand in this deal, Mr. Superintendent, and haven't been potted. The scoundrels broke for cover the moment we opened fire."

By this time there were twenty passengers about our group, all of them asking questions at once, making it difficult to learn just what had happened; but, so far as I could piece the answers together, the poker-players' curiosity had been aroused by the long stop, and, looking out, they had seen a single man with a rifle standing by the engine. Instantly arming themselves, Lord Ralles let fly both barrels at him, and in turn was the target for the first four shots I had heard. The shooting had brought the rest of the robbers tumbling off the cars, and the captain and Cullen had fired the rest of the shots at them as they scattered. I didn't stop to hear more, but went forward to see what the road agents had got away with.

I found the express agent tied hand and foot in the corner of his car, and, telling a brakeman who had followed me to set him at liberty, I turned my attention to the safe. That the diversion had not come a moment too soon was shown by the dynamite cartridge already in place, and by the fuse that lay on the floor, as if dropped suddenly. But the safe was intact.

Passing into the mail-car, I found the clerk tied to a post, with a mail-sack pulled over his head, and the utmost confusion among the pouches and sorting-compartments, while scattered over the floor were a great many letters. Setting him at liberty, I asked him if he could tell whether mail had been taken, and, after a glance at the confusion, he said he could not know till he had examined.

Having taken stock of the harm done, I began asking questions. Just after we had left Sanders, two masked men had entered the mail-car, and while one covered the clerk with a revolver the other had tied and "sacked" him. Two more had gone forward and done the same to the express agent. Another had climbed over the tender and ordered the runner to hold up. All this was regular programme, as I had explained to Miss Cullen, but here had been a variation which I had never heard of being done, and of which I couldn't fathom the object. When the train had been stopped, the man on the tender had ordered the fireman to dump his fire, and now it was lying in the road-bed and threatening to burn through the ties; so my first order was to extinguish it, and my second was to start a new fire and get up steam as quickly as possible. From all I could learn, there were eight men concerned in the attempt, and I confess I shook my head in puzzlement why that number should have allowed themselves to be scared off so easily.

My wonderment grew when I called on the conductor for his tickets. These showed nothing but two from Albuquerque, one from Laguna, and four from Coolidge. This latter would have looked hopeful but for the fact that it was a party of three women and a man. Going back beyond Lamy didn't give anything, for the conductor was able to account for every fare as either still in the train or as having got off at some point. My only conclusion was that the robbers had sneaked onto the platforms at Sanders; and I gave the crew a good dressing down for their carelessness. Of course they insisted it was impossible; but they were bound to do that.

Going back to 97, I got my telegraph instrument, though I thought it a waste of time, the road agents being always careful to break the lines. I told a brakeman to climb the pole and cut a wire. While he was struggling up, Miss Cullen joined me.

"Do you really expect to catch them?"

"I shouldn't like to be one of them," I replied.

"But how can you do it?"

"You could understand better, Miss Cullen, if you knew this country. You see every bit of water is in use by ranches, and those fellows can't go more than fifty miles without watering. So we shall have word of them, wherever they go."

"Line cut, Mr. Gordon," came from overhead at this point, making Miss Cullen jump with surprise.

"What was that?" she asked.

I explained to her, and after making connections, I called Sanders. Much to my surprise, the agent responded. I was so astonished that for a moment I could not believe the fact.

"That is the queerest hold-up of which I ever heard," I remarked to Miss Cullen.

"Aw, in what respect?" asked Albert Cullen's voice, and, looking up, I found that he and quite a number of the passengers had joined us.

"The road agents make us dump our fire," I said, "and yet they haven't cut the wires in either direction. I can't see how they can escape us."

"What fun!" cried Miss Cullen.

"I don't see what difference either makes in their chance of escaping," said Lord Ralles.

While he was speaking, I ticked off the news of our being held up, and asked the agent if there had been any men about Sanders, or if he had seen any one board the train there. His answer was positive that no one could have done so, and that settled it as to Sanders. I asked the same questions of Allantown and Wingate, which were the only places we had stopped at after leaving Coolidge, getting the same answer. That eight men could have remained concealed on any of the platforms from that point was impossible, and I began to suspect magic. Then I called Coolidge, and told of the holding up, after which I telegraphed the agent at Navajo Springs to notify the commander at Fort Defiance, for I suspected the road agents would make for the Navajo reservation. Finally I called Flagstaff as I had Coolidge, directed that the authorities be notified of the facts, and ordered an extra to bring out the sheriff and posse.

"I don't think," said Miss Cullen, "that I am a bit more curious than most people, but it has nearly made me frantic to have you tick away on that little machine and hear it tick back, and not understand a word."

After that I had to tell her what I had said and learned.

"How clever of you to think of counting the tickets and finding out where people got on and off! I never should have thought of either," she said.

"It hasn't helped me much," I laughed, rather grimly, "except to eliminate every possible clue."

"They probably did steal on at one of the stops," suggested a passenger.

I shook my head. "There isn't a stick of timber nor a place of concealment on these alkali plains," I replied, "and it was bright moonlight till an hour ago. It would be hard enough for one man to get within a mile of the station without being seen, and it would be impossible for seven or eight."

"How do you know the number?" asked a passenger.

"I don't," I said. "That's the number the crew think there were; but I myself don't believe it."

"Why don't you believe the men?" asked Miss Cullen.

"First, because there is always a tendency to magnify, and next, because the road agents ran away so quickly."

"I counted at least seven," asserted Lord Ralles.

"Well, Lord Ralles," I said, "I don't want to dispute your eyesight, but if they had been that strong they would never have bolted, and if you want to lay a bottle of wine, I'll wager that when I catch those chaps we'll find there weren't more than three or four of them."

"Done!" he snapped.

Leaving the group, I went forward to get the report of the mail agent. He had put things to right, and told me that, though the mail had been pretty badly mixed up, only one pouch at worst had been rifled. This—the one for registered mail—had been cut open, but, as if to increase the mystery, the letters had been scattered, unopened, about the car, only three out of the whole being missing, and those very probably had fallen into the pigeon-holes and would be found on a more careful search.

I confess I breathed easier to think that the road agents had got away with nothing, and was so pleased that I went back to the wire to send the news of it, that the fact might be included in the press despatches. The moon had set, and it was so dark that I had some difficulty in finding the pole. When I found it, Miss Cullen was still standing there. What was more, a man was close beside her, and as I came up I heard her say, indignantly—

"I will not allow it. It is unfair to take such advantage of me. Take your arm away, or I shall call for help."

That was enough for me. One step carried my hundred and sixty pounds over the intervening ground, and, using the momentum of the stride to help, I put the flat of my hand against the shoulder of the man and gave him a shove. There are three or four Harvard men who can tell what that means, and they were braced for it, which this fellow wasn't. He went staggering back as if struck by a cow-catcher, and lay down on the ground a good fifteen feet away. His having his arm around Miss Cullen's waist unsteadied her so that she would have fallen too if I hadn't put my hand against her shoulder. I longed to put it about her, but by this time I didn't want to please myself, but to do only what I thought she would wish, and so restrained myself.

Before I had time to finish an apology to Miss Cullen, the fellow was up on his feet, and came at me with an exclamation of anger. In my surprise at recognizing the voice as that of Lord Ralles, I almost neglected to take care of myself; but, though he was quick with his fists, I caught him by the wrists as he closed, and he had no chance after that against a fellow of my weight.

"Oh, don't quarrel!" cried Miss Cullen.

Holding him, I said, "Lord Ralles, I overheard what Miss Cullen was saying, and, supposing some man was insulting her, I acted as I did." Then I let go of him, and, turning, I continued, "I am very sorry, Miss Cullen, if I did anything the circumstances did not warrant," while cursing myself for my precipitancy and for not thinking that Miss Cullen would never have been caught in such a plight with a man unless she had been half willing; for a girl does not merely threaten to call for help if she really wants aid.

Lord Ralles wasn't much mollified by my explanation. "You're too much in a hurry, my man," he growled, speaking to me as if I were a servant. "Be a bit more careful in the future."

I think I should have retorted—for his manner was enough to make a saint mad—if Miss Cullen hadn't spoken.

"You tried to help me, Mr. Gordon, and I am deeply grateful for that," she said. The words look simple enough set down here. But the tone in which she said them, and the extended hand and the grateful little squeeze she gave my fingers, all seemed to express so much that I was more puzzled over them than I was over the robbery.

CHAPTER IV

SOME RATHER QUEER ROAD AGENTS

"You had better come back to the car, Miss Cullen," remarked Lord Ralles, after a pause.

But she declined to do so, saying she wanted to know what I was going to telegraph; and he left us, for which I wasn't sorry. I told her of the good news I had to send, and she wanted to know if now we would try to catch the road agents. I set her mind at rest on that score. "I think they'll give us very little trouble to bag," I added, "for they are so green that it's almost pitiful."

"In not cutting the wires?" she asked.

"In everything," I replied. "But the worst botch is their waiting till we had just passed the Arizona line. It they had held us up an hour earlier, it would only have been State's prison."

"And what will it be now?"

"Hanging."

"What?" cried Miss Cullen.

"In New Mexico train-robbing is not capital, but in Arizona it is," I told her.

"And if you catch them they'll be hung?" she asked.

"Yes."

"That seems very hard."

The first signs of dawn were beginning to show by this time, and as the sky brightened I told Miss Cullen that I was going to look for the trail of the fugitives. She said she would walk with me, if not in the way, and my assurance was very positive on that point. And here I want to remark that it's saying a good deal if a girl can be up all night in such excitement and still look fresh and pretty, and that she did.

I ordered the crew to look about, and then began a big circle around the train. Finding nothing, I swung a bigger one. That being equally unavailing, I did a larger third. Not a trace of foot or hoof within a half-mile of the cars! I had heard of blankets laid down to conceal a trail, of swathed feet, even of leathern horse-boots with cattle-hoofs on the bottom, but none of these could have been used for such a distance, let alone the entire absence of any signs of a place where the horses had been hobbled. Returning to the train, the report of the men was the same.

"We've ghost road agents to deal with, Miss Cullen," I laughed. "They come from nowhere, bullets touch them not, their lead hurts nobody, they take nothing, and they disappear without touching the ground."

"How curious it is!" she exclaimed. "One would almost suppose it a dream."

"Hold on," I said. "We do have something tangible, for if they disappeared they left their shells behind them." And I pointed to some cartridge-shells that lay on the ground beside the mail-car. "My theory of aerial bullets won't do."

"The shells are as hollow as I feel," laughed Miss Cullen.

"Your suggestion reminds me that I am desperately hungry," I said. "Suppose we go back and end the famine."

Most of the passengers had long since returned to their seats or berths, and Mr. Cullen's party had apparently done the same, for 218 showed no signs of life. One of my darkies was awake, and he broiled a steak and made us some coffee in no time, and just as they were ready Albert Cullen appeared, so we made a very jolly little breakfast. He told me at length the part he and the Britishers had borne, and only made me marvel the more that any one of them was alive, for apparently they had jumped off the car without the slightest precaution, and had stood grouped together, even after they had called attention to themselves by Lord Ralles's shots. Cullen had to confess that he heard the whistle of the four bullets unpleasantly close.

"You have a right to be proud, Mr. Cullen," I said. "You fellows did a tremendously pluckly thing, and, thanks to you, we didn't lose anything."

"But you went to help too, Mr. Gordon," added Miss Cullen.

That made me color up, and, after a moment's hesitation, I said—

"I'm not going to sail under false colors, Miss Cullen. When I went forward I didn't think I could do anything. I supposed whoever had pitched into the robbers was dead, and I expected to be the same inside of ten minutes."

"Then why did you risk your life," she asked, "if you thought it was useless?"

I laughed, and, though ashamed to tell it, replied, "I didn't want you to think that the Britishers had more pluck than I had."

She took my confession better than I hoped she would, laughing with me, and then said, "Well, that was courageous, after all."

"Yes," I confessed, "I was frightened into bravery."

"Perhaps if they had known the danger as well as you, they would have been less courageous," she continued; and I could have blessed her for the speech.

While we were still eating, the mail clerk came to my car and reported that the most careful search had failed to discover the three registered letters, and they had evidently been taken. This made me feel sober, slight as the probable loss was. He told me that his list showed they were all addressed to Ash Fork, Arizona, making it improbable that their contents could be of any real value. If possible, I was more puzzled than ever.

At six-ten the runner whistled to show he had steam up. I told one of the brakemen to stay behind, and then went into 218. Mr. Cullen was still dressing, but I expressed my regrets through the door that I could not go with his party to the Grand Cañon, told him that all the stage arrangements had been completed, and promised to join him there in case my luck was good. Then I saw Frederic for a moment, to see how he was (for I had nearly forgotten him in the excitement), to find that he was gaining all the time, and preparing even to get up. When I returned to the saloon, the rest of the party were there, and I bade good-bye to the captain and Albert. Then I turned to Lord Ralles, and, holding out my hand, said—

"Lord Ralles, I joked a little the other morning about the way you thought road agents ought to be treated. You have turned the joke very neatly and pluckily, and I want to apologize for myself and thank you for the railroad."

"Neither is necessary," he retorted airily, pretending not to see my hand.

I never claimed to have a good temper, and it was all I could do to hold myself in. I turned to Miss Cullen to wish her a pleasant trip, and the thought that this might be our last meeting made me forget even Lord Ralles.

"I hope it isn't good-bye, but only *au revoir,*" she said. "Whether or no, you must let us see you some time in Chicago, so that I may show you how grateful I am for all the pleasure you have added to our trip." Then, as I stepped down off my platform, she leaned over the rail of 218, and added, in a low voice, "I thought you were just as brave as the rest, Mr. Gordon, and now I think you are braver."

I turned impulsively, and said, "You would think so, Miss Cullen, if you knew the sacrifice I am making." Then, without looking at her, I gave the signal, the bell rang, and No. 3 pulled off. The last thing I saw was a handkerchief waving off the platform of 218.

When the train dropped out of sight over a grade, I swallowed the lump in my throat and went to the telegraph instrument. I wired Coolidge to give the alarm to Fort Wingate, Fort Apache, Fort Thomas, Fort Grant, Fort Bayard, and Fort Whipple, though I thought the precaution a mere waste of energy. Then I sent the brakeman up to connect the cut wire.

"Two of the bullets struck up here, Mr. Gordon," the man called from the top of the pole.

"Surely not!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, sir," he responded. "The bullet-holes are brand-new."

I took in the lay of the land, the embers of the fire showing me how the train had lain. "I don't wonder nobody was hit," I exclaimed, "if that's a sample of their shooting. Some one was a worse rattled man than I ever expect to be. Dig the bullets out, Douglas, so that we can have a look at them."

He brought them down in a minute. They proved to be Winchesters, as I had expected, for they were on the side from which the robbers must have fired.

"That chap must have been full of Arizona tangle-foot, to have fired as wild as he did," I ejaculated, and walked over to where the mail-car had stood, to see just how bad the shooting was. When I got there and faced about, it was really impossible to believe any man could have done so badly, for raising my own Winchester to the pole put it twenty degrees out of range and nearly forty degrees in the air. Yet there were the cartridge-shells on the ground, to show that I was in the place from which the shots had been fired.

While I was still cogitating over this, the special train I had ordered out from Flagstaff came in sight, and in a few moments was stopped where I was. It consisted of a string of three flats and a box car, and brought the sheriff, a dozen cowboys whom he had sworn in as deputies, and their horses. I was hopeful that with these fellows' greater skill in such matters they could find what I had not, but after a thorough examination of the ground within a mile of the robbery they were as much at fault as I had been.

"Them cusses must have a dugout nigh abouts, for they couldn't 'a' got away without wings," the sheriff surmised.

I didn't put much stock in that idea, and told the sheriff so.

"Waal, round up a better one," was his retort.

Not being able to do that, I told him of the bullets in the telegraph pole, and took him over to where the mail-car had stood.

"Jerusalem crickets!" was his comment as he measured the aim. "If that's where they put two of their pills, they must have pumped the other four inter the moon."

"What other four?" I asked.

"Shots," he replied sententiously.

"The road agents only fired four times," I told him.

"Them and your pards must have been pretty nigh together for a minute, then," he said, pointing to the ground.

I glanced down, and sure enough, there were six empty cartridge-shells. I stood looking blankly at them, hardly able to believe what I saw; for Albert Cullen had said distinctly that the train-robbers had fired only four times, and that the last three Winchester shots I had heard had been fired by himself. Then, without speaking, I walked slowly back, searching along the edge of the road-bed for more shells; but, though I went beyond the point where the last car had stood, not one did I find. Any man who has fired a Winchester knows that it drops its empty shell in loading, and I could therefore draw only one conclusion—namely, that all seven discharges of the Winchesters had occurred up by the mail-car. I had heard of men supposing they had fired their guns through hearing another go off; but with a repeating rifle one has to fire before one can reload. The fact was evident that Albert Cullen either had fired his Winchester up by the mail-car, or else had not fired it at all. In either case he had lied, and Lord Ralles and Captain Ackland had backed him up in it.

THE GREAT K. & A.

CHAPTER V

A TRIP TO THE GRAND CAÑON

I stood pondering, for no explanation that would fit the facts seemed possible. I should have considered the young fellow's story only an attempt to gain a little reputation for pluck, if in any way I could have accounted for the appearance and disappearance of the robbers. Yet to suppose—which seemed the only other horn to the dilemma—that the son and guests of the vice-president of the Missouri Western, and one of our own directors, would be concerned in train-robbery was to believe something equally improbable. Indeed, I should have put the whole thing down as a practical joke of Mr. Cullen's party, if it had not been for the loss of the registered letters.

Even a practical joker would hardly care to go to the length of cutting open government mail-pouches; for Uncle Sam doesn't approve of such conduct.

Whatever the explanation, I had enough facts to prevent me from wasting more time on that alkali plain. Getting the men and horses back onto the cars, I jumped up on the tail-board and ordered the runner to pull out for Flagstaff. It was a run of seven hours, getting us in a little after eight, and in those hours I had done a lot of thinking which had all come to one result—that Mr. Cullen's party was concerned in the hold-up.

The two private cars were on a siding, but the Cullens had left for the Grand Cañon the moment they had arrived, and were about reaching there by this time. I went to 218 and questioned the cook and waiter, but they had either seen nothing or else had been primed, for not a fact did I get from them. Going to my own car, I ordered a quick supper, and while I was eating it I questioned my boy. He told me that he had heard the shots, and had bolted the front door of my car, as I had ordered when I went out; that as he turned to go to a safer place, he had seen a man, revolver in hand, climb over the off-side gate of Mr. Cullen's car, and for a moment he had supposed it a road agent, till he saw that it was Albert Cullen.

"That was just after I had got off?" I asked.

"Yis, sah.

"Then it couldn't have been Mr. Cullen, Jim," I declared, "for I found him up at the other end of the car."

"Tell you it wuz, Mr. Gordon," Jim insisted. "I done seen his face clar in de light, and he done go into Mr. Cullen's car whar de old gentleman wuz sittin'."

That set me whistling to myself, and I laughed to think how near I had come to giving nitroglycerin to a fellow who was only shamming heart-failure; for that it was Frederic Cullen who had climbed on the car I hadn't the slightest doubt, the resemblance between the two brothers being quite strong enough to deceive any one who had never seen them together. I smiled a little, and remarked to myself, "I think I can make good my boast that I would catch the robbers; but whether the Cullens will like my doing it, I question. What is more, Lord Ralles will owe me a bottle." Then I thought of Madge, and didn't feel as pleased over my success as I had felt a moment before.

By nine o'clock the posse and I were in the saddle and skirting the San Francisco peaks. There was no use of pressing the ponies, for our game wasn't trying to escape, and, for that matter, couldn't, as the Colorado River wasn't passable within fifty miles. It was a lovely moonlight night, and the ride through the pines was as pretty a one as I remember ever to have made. It set me thinking of Madge and of our talk the evening before, and of what a change twenty-four hours had brought. It was lucky I was riding an Indian pony, or I should probably have landed in a heap. I don't know that I should have cared particularly if a prairie-dog burrow had made me dash my brains out, for I wasn't happy over the job that lay before me.

We watered at Silver Spring at quarter-past twelve. From that point we were clear of the pines and out on the plain, so we could go a better pace. This brought us to the half-way ranch by two, where we gave the ponies a feed and an hour's rest. We reached the last relay station just as the moon set, about three-forty; and, as all the rest of the ride was through coconino forest, we held up there for daylight, getting a little sleep meanwhile.

We rode into the camp at the Grand Cañon a little after eight, and the deserted look of the tents gave me a moment's fright, for I feared that the party had gone. Tolfree explained, however, that some had ridden out to Moran Point, and the rest had gone down Hance's trail. So I breakfasted and then took a look at Albert Cullen's Winchester. That it had been recently fired was as plain as the Grand Cañon itself; throwing back the bar, I found an empty cartridge shell still oily from the discharge. That completed the tale of seven shots. I didn't feel absolutely safe till I had asked Tolfree if there had been any shooting of echoes by the party, but his denial rounded out my chain of evidence.

Telling the sheriff to guard the bags of the party carefully, I took two of the posse and rode over to Moran's Point. Sure enough there were Mr. Cullen, Albert, and Captain Ackland. They gave a shout at seeing me, and even before I had reached them they called to know how I could come so soon, and if I had caught the robbers. Mr. Cullen started to tell his pleasure at my rejoining the party, but my expression made him pause, and it seemed to dawn on all three that the Winchester across my saddle, and the cowboys' hands resting nonchalantly on the revolvers in their belts, had a meaning.

"Mr. Cullen," I explained, "I've got a very unpleasant job on hand, which I don't want to make any worse than need be. Every fact points to your party as guilty of holding up the train last night and stealing those letters. Probably you weren't all concerned, but I've got to go on the assumption that you are all guilty, till you prove otherwise."

"Aw, you're joking," drawled Albert.

"I hope so," I said, "but for the present I've got to be English and treat the joke seriously."

"What do you want to do?" asked Mr. Cullen.

"I don't wish to arrest you gentlemen unless you force me to," I said, "for I don't see that it will do any good. But I want you to return to camp with us."

They assented to that, and, single file, we rode back. When there I told each that he must be searched, to which they submitted at once. After that we went through their baggage. I wasn't going to have the sheriff or cowboys tumbling over Miss Cullen's clothes, so I looked over her bag myself. The prettiness and daintiness of the various contents were a revelation to me, and I tried to put them back as neatly as I had found them, but I didn't know much about the articles, and it was a terrible job trying to fold up some of the things. Why, there was a big pink affair, lined with silk, with bits of ribbon and lace all over it, which nearly drove me out of my head, for I would have defied mortal man to pack it so that it shouldn't muss. I had a funny little feeling of tenderness for everything, which made fussing over it all a pleasure, even while I felt all the time that I was doing a sneak act and had really no right to touch her belongings. I didn't find anything incriminating, and the posse reported the same result with the other baggage. If the letters were still in existence, they were either concealed somewhere or were in the possession of the party in the Cañon. Telling the sheriff to keep those in the camp under absolute surveillance, I took a single man, and saddling a couple of mules, started down the trail.

We found Frederic and "Captain" Hance just dismounting at the Rock Cabin, and I told the former he was in custody for the present, and asked him where Miss Cullen and Lord Ralles were. He told me they were just behind; but I wasn't going to take any risks, and, ordering the deputy to look after Cullen, I went on down the trail. I couldn't resist calling back—

"How's your respiration, Mr. Cullen?"

He laughed, and called, "Digitalis put me on my feet like a flash."

"He's got the most brains of any man in this party," I remarked to myself.

The trail at this point is very winding, so that one can rarely see fifty feet in advance, and sometimes not ten. Owing to this, the first thing I knew I plumped round a curve on to a mule, which was patiently standing there. Just back of him was another, on which sat Miss Cullen, and standing close beside her was Lord Ralles. One of his hands held the mule's bridle; the other held Madge's arm, and he was saying, "You owe it to me, and I will have one. Or if—"

I swore to myself, and coughed aloud, which made Miss Cullen look up. The moment she saw me she cried, "Mr. Gordon! How delightful!" even while she grew as red as she had been pale the moment before. Lord Ralles grew red too, but in a different way.

"Have you caught the robbers?" cried Miss Cullen.

"I'm afraid I have," I answered.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

I smiled at the absolute innocence and wonder with which she spoke, and replied, "I know now, Miss Cullen, why you said I was braver than the Britishers."

"How do you know?"

I couldn't resist getting in a side-shot at Lord Ralles, who had mounted his mule and sat scowling. "The train-robbers were such thoroughgoing duffers at the trade," I said, "that if they had left their names and addresses they wouldn't have made it much easier. We Americans may not know enough to deal with real road agents, but we can do something with amateurs."

"What are we stopping here for?" snapped Lord Ralles.

"I'm sure I don't know," I responded. "Miss Cullen, if you will kindly pass us, and then if Lord Ralles will follow you, we will go on to the cabin. I must ask you to keep close together."

"I stay or go as I please, and not by your orders," asserted Lord Ralles, snappishly.

"Out in this part of the country," I said calmly, "it is considered shocking bad form for an unarmed man to argue with one who carries a repeating rifle. Kindly follow Miss Cullen." And, leaning over, I struck his mule with the loose ends of my bridle, starting it up the trail.

When we reached the cabin the deputy told me that he had made Frederic strip and had searched his clothing, finding nothing. I ordered Lord Ralles to dismount and go into the cabin.

"For what?" he demanded.

"We want to search you," I answered.

"I don't choose to be searched," he protested. "You have shown no warrant, nor—"

I wasn't in a mood toward him to listen to his talk. I swung my Winchester into line and announced, "I was sworn in last night as a deputy-sheriff, and am privileged to shoot a train-robber on sight. Either dead or alive, I'm going to search your clothing inside of ten minutes; and if you have no preference as to whether the examination is an ante or post-mortem affair, I certainly havent."

That brought him down off his high horse—that is, mule—and I sent the deputy in with him with directions to toss his clothes out to me, for I wanted to keep my eye on Miss Cullen and her brothers, so as to prevent any legerdemain on their part.

One by one the garments came flying through the door to me. As fast as I finished examining them I pitched them back, except— Well, as I have thought it over since then, I have decided that I did a mean thing, and have regretted it. But just put yourself in my place, and think of how Lord Ralles had talked to me as if I was his servant, had refused my apology and thanks, and been as generally "nasty" as he could, and perhaps, you won't blame me that, after looking through his trousers, I gave them a toss which, instead of sending them back into the hut, sent them over the edge of the trail. They went down six hundred feet before they lodged in a poplar, and if his lordship followed the trail he could get round to them, but there would then be a hundred feet of sheer rock between the trail and the trousers." I hope it will teach him to study his Lord Chesterfield to better purpose, for if politeness doesn't cost anything, rudeness can cost considerable," I chuckled to myself.

My amusement did not last long, for my next thought was, "If those letters are concealed on any one, they are on Miss Cullen." The thought made me lean up against my mule, and turn hot and cold by turns.

A nice situation for a lover!

CHAPTER VI

THE HAPPENINGS DOWN HANCE'S TRAIL

Miss Cullen was sitting on a rock apart from her brother and Hance, as I had asked her to do when I helped her dismount. I went over to where she sat, and said, boldly—

"Miss Cullen, I want those letters."

"What letters?" she asked, looking me in the eyes with the most innocent of expressions. She made a mistake to do that, for I knew her innocence must be feigned, and so didn't put much faith in her face for the rest of the interview.

"And what is more," I continued, with a firmness of manner about as genuine as her innocence, "unless you will produce them at once, I shall have to search you."

"Mr. Gordon!" she exclaimed, but she put such surprise and grief and disbelief into the four syllables that I wanted the earth to swallow me then and there.

"Why, Miss Cullen," I cried, "look at my position. I'm being paid to do certain things, and—"

"But that needn't prevent your being a gentleman," she interrupted.

That made me almost desperate. "Miss Cullen," I groaned, hurriedly, "I'd rather be burned alive than do what I've got to, but if you won't give me those letters, search you I must."

"But how can I give you what I haven't?" she cried, indignantly, assuming again her innocent expression.

"Will you give me your word of honor that those letters are not concealed in your clothes?"

"I will," she answered.

I was very much taken aback, for it would have been so easy for Miss Cullen to have said so before that I had become convinced she must have them.

"And do you give me your word?"

"I do," she affirmed, but she didn't look me in the face as she said it.

I ought to have been satisfied, but I wasn't, for, in spite of her denial, something forced me still to believe she had them, and looking back now, I think it was her manner. I stood reflecting for a minute, and then requested, "Please stay where you are for a moment." Leaving her, I went over to Fred.

"Mr. Cullen," I said, "Miss Cullen, rather than be searched, has acknowledged that she has the letters, and says that if we men will go into the hut she'll get them for me."

He rose at once. "I told my father not to drag her in," he muttered, sadly. "I don't care about myself, Mr. Gordon, but can't you keep her out of it? She's as innocent of any real wrong as the day she was born."

"I'll do everything in my power," I promised. Then he and Hance went into the cabin, and I walked back to the culprit.

"Miss Cullen," I said gravely, "you have those letters, and must give them to me."

"But I told you—" she began.

To spare her a second untruth, I interrupted her by saying, "I trapped your brother into acknowledging that you have them."

"You must have misunderstood him," she replied, calmly, "or else he didn't know that the arrangement was changed."

Her steadiness rather shook my conviction, but I said, "You must give me those letters, or I must search you."

"You never would!" she cried, rising and looking me in the face.

On impulse I tried a big bluff. I took hold of the lapel of her waist, intending to undo just one button. I let go in fright when I found there was no button—only an awful complication of hooks or some other feminine method for keeping things together—and I grew red and trembled thinking what might have happened had I, by bad luck, made anything come undone. If Miss Cullen had been noticing me, she would have seen a terribly scared man.

But she wasn't, luckily, for the moment my hand touched her dress, and before she could realize that I snatched it away, she collapsed on the rock, and burst into tears. "Oh! oh!" she sobbed, "I begged papa not to, but he insisted they were safest with me. I'll give them to you, if you'll only go away and not—" Her tears made her inarticulate, and without waiting for more I ran into the hut, feeling as near like a murderer as a guiltless man could.

Lord Ralles by this time was making almost as much noise as an engine pulling a heavy freight up grade under forced draft, swearing over his trousers, and was offering the cowboy and Hance money to recover them. When they told him this was impossible he tried to get them to sell or hire a pair, but they didn't like the idea of riding into camp minus those essentials any better than he did. While I waited they settled the difficulty by strapping a blanket round him, and by splitting it up the middle and using plenty of cord they rigged him out after a fashion; but I think if he could have seen himself and been given an option he would have preferred to wait till it was dark enough to creep into camp unnoticed.

Before long Miss Cullen called, and when I went to her she handed me, without a word, three letters. As she did so she crimsoned violently, and looked down in her mortification. I was so sorry for her that, though a moment before I had been judging her harshly, I now couldn't help saying—

"Our positions have been so difficult, Miss Cullen, that I don't think we either of us are quite responsible for our actions."

She said nothing, and, after a pause, I continued—

"I hope you'll think as leniently of my conduct as you can, for I can't tell you how grieved I am to have pained you."

Cullen joined us at this point, and, knowing that every moment we remained would be distressing to his sister, I announced that we would start up the trail. I hadn't the heart to offer to help her mount, and after Frederic had put her up we fell into single file behind Hance, Lord Ralles coming last.

As soon as we started I took a look at the three letters. They were all addressed to Theodore E. Camp, Esq., Ash Fork, Arizona—one of the directors of the K. & A. and also of the Great Southern. With this clue, for the first time things began to clear up to me, and when the trail broadened enough to permit it, I pushed my mule up alongside of Cullen and asked—

"The letters contain proxies for the K. & A. election next Friday?"

He nodded his head. "The Missouri Western and the Great Southern are fighting for control," he explained, "and we should have won but for the three blocks of Eastern stock that had promised their proxies to the G. S. Rather than lose the fight, we arranged to learn when those proxies were mailed—that was what kept me behind—and then to hold up the train that carried them."

"Was it worth the risk?" I ejaculated.

"If we had succeeded, yes. My father had put more than was safe into Missouri Western and into California Central. The G. S. wants control to end the traffic agreements, and that means bankruptcy to my father."

I nodded, seeing it all as clear as day, and hardly blaming the Cullens for what they had done; for any one who has had dealings with the G. S. is driven to pretty desperate methods to keep from being crushed, and when one is fighting an antagonist that won't regard the law, or rather one that, through control of legislatures and judges, makes the law to suit its needs, the temptation is strong to use the same weapons one's self.

"The toughest part of it is," Fred went on, "that we thought we had the whole thing 'hands down,' and that was what made my father go in so deep. Only the death of one of the M. W. directors, who held eight thousand shares of K. & A., got us in this hole, for the G. S. put up a relation to contest the will, and so delayed the obtaining of letters of administration, blocking his executors from giving a proxy. It was as mean a trick as ever was played."

"The G. S. is a tough customer to fight," I remarked, and asked, "Why didn't you burn the letters?" really wishing they had done so.

"We feared duplicate proxies might get through in time, and thought that by keeping these we might cook up a question as to which were legal, and then by injunction prevent the use of either."

"And those Englishmen," I inquired, "are they real?"

"Oh, certainly," he rejoined. "They were visting my brother, and thought the whole thing great larks." Then he told me how the thing had been done. They had sent Miss Cullen to my car, so as to get me out of the way, though she hadn't known it. He and his brother got off the train at the last stop, with the guns and masks, and concealed themselves on the platform of the mail-car. Here they had been joined by the Britishers at the right moment, the disguises assumed, and the train held up as already told. Of course the dynamite cartridge was only a blind, and the letters had been thrown about the car merely to confuse the clerk. Then while Frederic Cullen, with the letters, had stolen back to the car, the two Englishmen had crept back to where they had stood. Here, as had been arranged, they opened fire, which Albert

Cullen duly returned, and then joined them. "I don't see now how you spotted us," Frederic ended.

I told him, and his disgust was amusing to see. "Going to Oxford may be all right for the classics," he growled, "but it's destructive to gumption."

We rode into camp a pretty gloomy crowd, and those of the party waiting for us there were not much better; but when Lord Ralles dismounted and showed up in his substitute for trousers there was a general shout of laughter. Even Miss Cullen had to laugh for a moment. And as his lordship bolted for his tent, I said to myself, "Honors are easy."

I told the sheriff that I had recovered the lost property, but did not think any arrests necessary as yet; and, as he was the agent of the K. & A. at Flagstaff, he didn't question my opinion. I ordered the stage out, and told Tolfree to give us a feed before we started, but a more silent meal I never sat down to, and I noticed that Miss Cullen didn't eat anything, while the tragic look on her face was so pathetic as nearly to drive me frantic.

We started a little after five, and were clear of the timber before it was too dark to see. At the relay station we waited an hour for the moon, after which it was a clear track. We reached the half-way ranch about eleven, and while changing the stage horses I roused Mrs. Klostermeyer, and succeeded in getting enough cold mutton and bread to make two rather decent-looking sandwiches. With these and a glass of whiskey and water I went to the stage, to find Miss Cullen curled up on the seat asleep, her head resting in her brother's arms.

"She has nearly worried herself to death ever since you told her that road agents were hung," Frederic whispered; "and she's been crying to-night over that lie she told you, and altogether she's worn out with travel and excitement."

I screwed the cover on the traveling-glass, and put it with the sandwiches in the bottom of the stage. "It's a long and a rough ride," I said, "and if she wakes up they may give her a little strength. I only wish I could have spared her the fatigue and anxiety."

"She thought she had to lie for father's sake, but she's nearly broken-hearted over it," he continued.

I looked Frederic in the face as I said, "I honor her for it," and in that moment he and I became friends.

"Just see how pretty she is!" he whispered, with evident affection and pride, turning back the flap of the rug in which she was wrapped.

She was breathing gently, and there was just that touch of weariness and sadness in her face that would appeal to any man. It made me gulp, I'm proud to say; and when I was back on my pony, I said to myself, "For her sake, I'll pull the Cullens out of this scrape, if it costs me my position."

CHAPTER VII

A CHANGE OF BASE

We did not reach Flagstaff till seven, and I told the stage-load to take possession of their car, while I went to my own. It took me some time to get freshened up, and then I ate my breakfast; for after riding seventy-two miles in one night even the most heroic purposes have to take the side-track. I think, as it was, I proved my devotion pretty well by not going to sleep, since I had been up three nights, with only such naps as I could steal in the saddle, and had ridden over a hundred and fifty miles to boot. But I couldn't bear to think of Miss Cullen's anxiety, and the moment I had made myself decent, and finished eating, I went into 218.

The party were all in the dining-room, but it was a very different-looking crowd from the one with which that first breakfast had been eaten, and they all looked at me as I entered as if I were the executioner come for victims.

"Mr. Cullen," I began, "I've been forced to do a lot of things that weren't pleasant, but I don't want to do more than I need. You're not the ordinary kind of road agents, and, as I presume your address is known, I don't see any need of arresting one of our own directors as yet. All I ask is that you give me your word, for the party, that none of you will try to leave the country."

"Certainly, Mr. Gordon," he responded. "And I thank you for your great consideration."

"I shall have to report the case to our president, and, I suppose, to the Postmaster-General, but I sha'n't hurry about either. What they will do, I can't say. Probably you know how far you can keep them quiet."

"I think the local authorities are all I have to fear, provided time is given me."

"I have dismissed the sheriff and his posse, and I gave them a hundred dollars for their work, and three bottles of pretty good whiskey I had on my car. Unless they get orders from elsewhere, you will not hear any further from them.

"You must let me reimburse what expense we have put you to, Mr. Gordon. I only wish I could as easily repay your kindness."

Nodding my head in assent, as well as in recognition of his thanks, I continued, "It was my duty, as an official of the K. & A., to recover the stolen mail, and I had to do it."

"We understand that," said Mr. Cullen, "and do not for a moment blame you."

"But," I went on, for the first time looking at Madge, "it is not my duty to take part in a contest for control of the K. & A., and I shall therefore act in this case as I should in any other loss of mail."

"And that is—?" asked Frederic.

"I am about to telegraph for instructions from Washington," I replied. "As the G. S. by trickery has dishonestly tied up some of your proxies, they ought not to object if we do the same by honest means; and I think I can manage so that Uncle Sam will prevent those proxies from being voted at Ash Fork on Friday."

If a galvanic battery had been applied to the group about the breakfast table, it wouldn't have made a bigger change. Madge clapped her hands in joy; Mr. Cullen said "God bless you!" with real feeling; Frederic jumped up and slapped me on the shoulder, crying, "Gordon, you're the biggest old trump breathing; while Albert and the captain shook hands with each other, in evident jubilation. Only Lord Ralles remained passive.

"Have you breakfasted?" asked Mr. Cullen, when the first joy was over.

"Yes," I said. "I only stopped in on my way to the station to telegraph the Postmaster-General."

"May I come with you and see what you say?" cried Fred, jumping up.

I nodded, and Miss Cullen said, questioningly, "Me too?" making me very happy by the question, for it showed that she would speak to me. I gave an assent quite as eagerly and in a moment we were all walking toward the platform. Despite Lord Ralles, I felt happy, and especially as I had not dreamed that she would ever forgive me.

I took a telegraph blank, and, putting it so that Miss Cullen could see what I said, wrote—

"Postmaster-General, Washington, D. C. I hold, awaiting your instructions, the three registered letters stolen from No. 3 Overland Missouri Western Express on Monday, October fourteenth, loss of which has already been notified you."

Then I paused and said, "So far, that's routine, Miss Cullen. Now comes the help for you," and I continued—

"The letters may have been tampered with, and I recommend a special agent. Reply Flagstaff, Arizona. RICHARD GORDON, Superintendent K. & A. R. R."

"What will that do?" she asked.

"I'm not much at prophecy, and we'll wait for the reply," I said.

All that day we lay at Flagstaff, and after a good sleep, as there was no use keeping the party cooped up in their car, I drummed up some ponies and took the Cullens and Ackland over to the Indian cliff-dwellings. I don't think Lord Ralles gained anything by staying behind in a sulk, for it was a very jolly ride, or at least that was what it was to me. I had of course to tell them all how I had settled on them as the criminals, and a general history of my doings. To hear Miss Cullen talk, one would have inferred I was the greatest of living detectives.

"The mistake we made," she asserted, "was not securing Mr. Gordon's help to begin with, for then we should never have needed to hold the train up, or if we had we should never have been discovered."

What was more to me than this ill-deserved admiration were two things she said on the way back, when we two had paired off and were a bit behind the rest.

"The sandwiches and the whiskey were very good," she told me, "and I'm so grateful for the trouble you took."

"It was a pleasure," I said.

"And, Mr. Gordon," she continued, and then hesitated for a moment—"my—Frederic told me that you—you said you honored me for—?"

"I do," I exclaimed energetically, as she paused and colored.

"Do you really?" she cried." I thought Fred was only trying to make me less unhappy by saying that you did."

"I said it, and I meant it," I told her.

"I have been so miserable over that lie," she went on; "but I thought if I let you have the letters it would ruin papa. I really wouldn't mind poverty myself, Mr. Gordon, but he takes such pride in success that I couldn't be the one to do it. And then, after you told me that train-robbers were hung. I had to lie to save them. I ought to have known you would help us."

I thought this a pretty good time to make a real apology for my conduct on the trail, as well as to tell her how sorry I was at not having been able to repack her bag better. She accepted my apology very sweetly, and assured me her belongings had been put away so neatly that she had wondered who did it. I knew she only said this out of kindness, and told her so, telling also of my struggles over that pink-beribboned and belaced affair, in a way which made her laugh. I had thought it was a ball gown, and wondered at her taking it to the Cañon; but she explained that it was what she called a "throw"—which I told her accounted for the throes I had gone through over it. It made me open my eyes, thinking that anything so pretty could be used for the same purposes for which I use my crash bath-gown, and while my eyes were open I saw the folly of thinking that a girl who wore such things would, or in fact could, ever get along on my salary. In that way the incident was a good lesson for me, for it made me feel that, even if there had been no Lord Ralles, I still should have had no chance.

On our return to the cars there was a telegram from the

Postmaster-General awaiting me. After a glance at it, as the rest of the party looked anxiously on, I passed it over to Miss Cullen, for I wanted her to have the triumph of reading it aloud to them. It read—

"Hold letters pending arrival of special agent Jackson, due in Flagstaff October twentieth."

"The election is the eighteenth," Frederic laughed, executing a war dance on the platform. "The G. S.'s dough is cooked."

"I must waltz with some one," cried Madge, and before I could offer she took hold of Albert and the two went whirling about, much to my envy. The Cullens were about the most jubilant road agents I had ever seen.

After consultation with Mr. Cullen, we had 218 and 97 attached to No. 1 when it arrived, and started for Ash Fork. He wanted to be on the ground a day in advance, and I could easily be back in Flagstaff before the arrival of the special agent.

I took dinner in 218, and they toasted me, as if I had done something heroic instead of merely having sent a telegram. Later four sat down to poker, while Miss Cullen, Fred and I went out and sat on the platform of the car while Madge played on her guitar and sang to us. She had a very sweet voice, and before she had been singing long we had the crew of a "dust express"—as we jokingly call a gravel train—standing about, and they were speedily reinforced by many cowboys, who deserted the medley of cracked pianos or accordions of the Western saloons to listen to her, and who, not being overcareful in the terms with which they expressed their approval, finally by their riotous admiration drove us inside. At Miss Cullen's suggestion we three had a second game of poker, but with chips and not money. She was an awfully reckless player, and the luck was dead in my favor, so Madge kept borrowing my chips, till she was so deep in that we both lost account. Finally, when we parted for the night she held out her hand, and, in the prettiest of ways, said—

"I am so deeply in your debt, Mr. Gordon, that I don't see how I can ever repay you."

I tried to think of something worth saying, but the words wouldn't come, and I could only shake her hand. But, duffer as I was, the way she had said those words, and the double meaning she had given them, would have made me the happiest fellow alive if I could only have forgotten the existence of Lord Ralles.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW DID THE SECRET LEAK OUT?

I made up for my three nights' lack of sleep by not waking the next morning till after ten. When I went to 218, I found only the *chef,* and he told me the party had gone for a ride. Since I couldn't talk to Madge, I went to work at my desk, for I had been rather neglecting my routine work. While I still wrote, I heard horses' hoofs and, looking up, saw the Cullens returning. I went out on the platform to wish them good-morning, arriving just in time to see Lord Ralles help Miss Cullen out of her saddle; and the way he did it, and the way he continued to hold her hand after she was down, while he said something to her, made me grit my teeth and look the other way. None of the riders had seen me, so I slipped into my car and went back to work. Fred came in presently to see if I was up yet, and to ask me to lunch, but I felt so miserable and down-hearted that I made an excuse of my late breakfast for not joining them.

After luncheon the party in the other special all came out and walked up and down the platform, the sound of their voices and laughter only making me feel the bluer. Before long I heard a rap on one of my windows, and there was Miss Cullen peering in at me. The moment I looked up, she called—

"Won't you make one of us, Mr. Misanthrope?"

I called myself all sorts of a fool, but out I went as eagerly as if there had been some hope. Miss Cullen began to tease me over my sudden access of energy, declaring that she was sure it was a pose for their benefit, or else due to a guilty conscience over having slept so late.

"I hoped you would ride with us, though perhaps it wouldn't have paid you. Apparently there is nothing to see in Ash Fork."

"There is something that may interest you all," I suggested, pointing to a special that had been dropped off No. 2 that morning.

"What is it?" asked Madge.

"It's a G. S. special," I said, "and Mr. Camp and Mr. Baldwin and two G. S. officials came in on it."

"What do you think he'd give for those letters?" laughed Fred.

"If they were worth so much to you, I suppose they can't be worth any less to the G. S.," I replied.

"Fortunately, there is no way that he can learn where they are," said Mr. Cullen.

"Don't let's stand still," cried Miss Cullen. "Mr. Gordon, I'll run you a race to the end of the platform." She said this only after getting a big lead, and she got there about eight inches ahead of me, which pleased her mightily. "It takes men so long to get started," was the way she explained her victory. Then she walked me beyond the end of the boarding to explain the working of a switch to her. That it was only a pretext she proved to me the moment I had relocked the bar, by saying—

"Mr. Gordon, may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly," I assented.

"It is one I should ask papa or Fred, but I am afraid they might not tell me the truth. You will, won't you?" she begged, very earnestly.

"I will,'" I promised.

"Supposing," she continued, "that it became known that you have those letters? Would it do our side any harm?"

I thought for a moment, and then shook my head. "No new proxies could arrive here in time for the election," I said, "and the ones I have will not be voted."

She still looked doubtful, and asked, "Then why did papa say just now, 'Fortunately'?"

"He merely meant that it was safer they shouldn't know."

"Then it is better to keep it a secret?" she asked, anxiously.

"I suppose so," I said, and then, added, "Why should you be afraid of asking your father?"

"Because he might—well, if he knew, I'm sure he would sacrifice himself; and I couldn't run the risk."

"I am afraid I don't understand?" I questioned.

"I would rather not explain," she said, and of course that ended the subject.

Our exercise taken, we went back to the Cullens' car, and Madge left us to write some letters. A moment later Lord Ralles remembered he had not written home recently, and he too went forward to the dining-room. That made me call myself—something, for not having offered Miss Cullen the use of my desk in 97. Owing to this the two missed part of the big game we were playing; for barely were they gone when one of the servants brought a card to Mr. Cullen, who looked at it and exclaimed, "Mr. Camp!" Then, after a speaking pause, in which we all exchanged glances, he said, "Bring him in."

On Mr. Camp's entrance he looked so much surprised as we had all done a moment before. "I beg your pardon for intruding, Mr. Cullen," he said. "I was told that this was Mr. Gordon's car, and I wish to see him."

"I am Mr. Gordon."

"You are traveling with Mr. Cullen?" he inquired, with a touch of suspicion in his manner.

"No," I answered. "My special is the next car, and I was merely enjoying a cigar here."

"Ah!" said Mr. Camp. "Then I won't interrupt your smoke, and will only relieve you of those letters of mine."

I took a good pull at my cigar, and blew the smoke out in a cloud slowly to gain time. "I don't think I follow you," I said.

"I understand that you have in your possession three letters addressed to me."

"I have," I assented.

"Then I will ask you to deliver them to me."

"I can't do that."

"Why not?" he challenged. "They're my property."

I produced the Postmaster-General's telegram and read it to him.

"Why, this is infamous!" Mr. Camp cried. "What use will those letters be after the eighteenth? It's a conspiracy."

"I can only obey instructions," I said.

"It shall cost you your position if you do," Mr. Camp threatened.

As I've already said, I haven't a good temper, and when he told me that I couldn't help retorting—

"That's quite on a par with most G. S. methods."

"I'm not speaking for the G. S., young man," roared Mr. Camp. "I speak as a director of the Kansas & Arizona. What is more, I will have those letters inside of twenty-four hours."

He made an angry exit, and I said to Fred, "I wish you would stroll about and spy out the proceedings of the enemy's camp. He may telegraph to Washington, and if there's any chance of the Postmaster-General revoking his order I must go back to Flagstaff on No. 4 this afternoon."

"He sha'n't do anything that I don't know about till he goes to bed," Fred promised. "But how the deuce did he know that you had those letters?"

That was just what we were all puzzling over, for only the occupants of No. 218 and myself, so far as I knew, were in a position to let Mr. Camp hear of that fact.

As Fred made his exit he said, "Don't tell Madge that there is a new complication, for the dear girl has had worries enough already."

Miss Cullen not rejoining us, and Lord Ralles presently doing so, I went to my own car, for he and I were not good furniture for the same room. Before I had been there long, Fred came rushing in.

"Camp and Baldwin have been in consultation with a lawyer," he said, "and now the three have just boarded those cars," pointing out the window at the branch-line train that was to leave for Phœnix in two minutes.

"You must go with them," I urged, "and keep us informed as to what they do, for they evidently are going to set the law on us, and the G. S. has always owned the Territorial judges, so they'll stretch a point to oblige them."

"Have I time to fill a bag?"

"Plenty," I assured him, and, going out, I ordered the train held till I should give the word.

"What does it all mean?" asked Miss Cullen, joining me.

I laughed, and replied, "I'm doing a braver thing even than your party did; I'm holding up a train all by my lonesome."

"But my brother came dashing in just now and said he was starting for Phœnix."

"Let her go," I called to the conductor, as Fred jumped aboard; and the train pulled out.

"I hope there's nothing wrong?" Madge questioned, anxiously.

"Nothing to worry over," I laughed. "Only a little more fun for our money. By the way, Miss Cullen," I went on, to avoid her questions, "if you have your letters ready, and will let me have them at once, I can get them on No. 4, so that they'll go East to-night."

Miss Cullen blushed as if I had said something I ought not to have, and stammered, "I—I changed my mind, and—that is—I didn't write them, after all."

"I beg your pardon—I ought to have known; I mean, it's very natural," I faltered and stuttered, thinking what a dunce I had been not to understand that both hers and Lord Ralles's letters had been only a pretext to get away from the rest of us.

My blundering apology and evident embarrassment deepened Miss Cullen's blush five-fold, and she explained, hurriedly, "I found I was tired, and so, instead of writing, I went to my room and rested."

I suppose any girl would have invented the same yarn, yet it hurt me more than the bigger one she had told on Hance's trail. Small as the incident was, it made me very blue, and led me to shut myself up in my own car for the rest of that afternoon and evening. Indeed, I couldn't sleep, but sat up working, quite forgetful of the passing hours, till a glance at my watch startled me with the fact that it was a quarter of two. Feeling like anything more than sleep, I went out on the platform, and, lighting a cigar, paced up and down, thinking of—well, thinking.

The night agent was sitting in the station, nodding, and after I had walked for an hour I went in to ask him if the train to Phœnix had arrived on time. Just as I opened the door, the telegraph instrument began clicking, and called Ash Fork. The man, with the curious ability that operators get of recognizing their own call, even in sleep, waked up instantly and responded, and, not wishing to interrupt him, I delayed asking my question till he should be free. I stood there thinking of Madge, and listening heedlessly as the instrument ticked off the cipher signature of the sending operator, and the "twenty-four paid." But as I heard the clicks .... which meant ph, I suddenly became attentive, and when it completed "Phœnix" I concluded Fred was wiring me, and listened for what followed the date. This is what the instrument ticked:—

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That may not look particularly intelligible, but if the Phœnix operator had been talking over the 'phone to me he couldn't have said any plainer—

"Sheriff yavapai county ash forks arizona be at rail road station three forty-five today to meet train arriving from phœnix prepared to immediately serve peremptory mandamus issued tonight by judge wilson sig theodore e camp."

My question being pretty thoroughly answered, I went back and continued my walk; but before five minutes had passed, the operator came out, and handed me a message. It was from Fred, and read thus:—

"Camp, Baldwin, and lawyer went at once to house of Judge Wilson, where they stayed an hour. They then returned with judge to station, and after despatching a telegram have taken seats in train for Ash Fork, leaving here at three twenty-five. I shall return with them."

A bigger idiot than I could have understood the move. I was to be hauled before Judge Wilson by means of mandamus proceedings, and, as he was notoriously a G. S. judge, and was coming to Ash Fork solely to oblige Mr. Camp, he would unquestionably declare the letters the property of Mr. Camp and order their delivery.

Apparently I had my choice of being a traitor to Madge, of going to prison for contempt of court, or of running away, which was not far off from acknowledging that I had done something wrong. I didn't like any one of the options.

CHAPTER IX

A TALK BEFORE BREAKFAST

Looking at my watch, I found it was a little after three, which meant six in Washington: allowing for transmission, a telegram would reach there in time to be on hand with the opening of the Departments. I therefore wired at once to the following effect:—

"Postmaster-General, Washington, D. C. A peremptory mandamus has been issued by Territorial judge to compel me to deliver to addressee the three registered letters which by your directions, issued October sixteenth, I was to hold pending arrival of special agent Jackson. Service of writ will be made at three forty-five to-day unless prevented. Telegraph me instructions how to act."

That done I had a good tub, took a brisk walk down the track, and felt so freshened up as to be none the worse for my sleepless night. I returned to the station a little after six, and, to my surprise, found Miss Cullen walking up and down the platform.

"You are up early!" we both said together.

"Yes," she sighed. "I couldn't sleep last night."

"You're not unwell, I hope?"

"No—except mentally."

I looked a question, and she went on: "I have some worries, and then last night I saw you were all keeping some bad news from me, and so I couldn't sleep."

"Then we did wrong to make a mystery of it, Miss Cullen," I said, "for it really isn't anything to trouble about. Mr. Camp is simply taking legal steps to try to force me to deliver those letters to him."

"And can he succeed?"

"No."

"How will you stop him?"

"I don't know yet just what we shall do, but if worse comes to worse I will allow myself to be committed for contempt of court."

"What would they do with you?"

"Give me free board for a time."

"Not send you to prison?"

"Yes."

"Oh!" she cried, "that mustn't be. You must not make such a sacrifice for us."

"I'd do more than that for *you,*" I said, and I couldn't help putting a little emphasis on the last word, though I knew I had no right to do it.

She understood me, and blushed rosily, even while she protested, "It is too much—"

"There's really no likelihood," I interrupted, "of my being able to assume a martyr's crown, Miss Cullen; so don't begin to pity me till I'm behind the bars."

"But I can't bear to think—"

"Don't," I interrupted again, rejoicing all the time at her evident anxiety, and blessing my stars for the luck they had brought me. "Why, Miss Cullen," I went on, "I've become so interested in your success and the licking of those fellows that I really think I'd stand about anything rather than that they should win. Yesterday, when Mr. Camp threatened to—" Then I stopped, as it suddenly occurred to me that it was best not to tell Madge that I might lose my position, for it would look like a kind of bid for her favor, and, besides, would only add to her worries.

"Threatened what?" asked Miss Cullen.

"Threatened to lose his temper," I answered.

"You know that wasn't what you were going to say," Madge said reproachfully.

"No, it wasn't," I laughed.

"Then what was it?"

"Nothing worth speaking about."

"But I want to know what he threatened."

"Really, Miss Cullen," I began; but she interrupted me by saying anxiously—

"He can't hurt papa, can he?"

"No," I replied.

"Or my brothers?"

"He can't touch any of them without my help. And he'll have work to get that, I suspect."

"Then why can't you tell me?" demanded Miss Cullen. "Your refusal makes me think you are keeping back some danger to them."

"Why, Miss Cullen," I said, "I didn't like to tell his threat, because it seemed—well, I may be wrong, but I thought it might look like an attempt—an appeal— Oh, pshaw!" I faltered, like a donkey—"I can't say it as I want to put it."

"Then tell me right out what he threatened," begged Madge.

"He threatened to get me discharged."

That made Madge look very sober, and for a moment there was silence. Then she said—

"I never thought of what you were risking to help us, Mr. Gordon. And I'm afraid it's too late to—"

"Don't worry about me," I hastened to interject. "I'm a long way from being discharged, and, even if I should be, Miss Cullen, I know my business, and it won't be long before I have another place."

"But it's terrible to think of the injury we may have caused you," sighed Madge, sadly. "It makes me hate the thought of money."

"That's a very poor thing to hate," I said, "except the lack of it."

"Are you so anxious to get rich?" asked Madge, looking up at me quickly, as we walked—for we had been pacing up and down the platform during our chat.

"I haven't been till lately."

"And what made you change?" she questioned.

"Well," I said, fishing round for some reason other than the true one, "perhaps I want to take a rest."

"You are the worst man for fibs I ever knew," she laughed.

"I felt myself getting red, while I exclaimed, "Why, Miss Cullen, I never set up for a George Washington, but I don't think I'm a bit worse liar than nine men in—"

"Oh," she cried, interrupting me, "I didn't mean that way. I meant that when you try to fib you always do it so badly that one sees right through you. Now, acknowledge that you wouldn't stop work if you could?"

"Well, no, I wouldn't," I owned up. "The truth is, Miss Cullen, that I'd like to be rich, because—well, hang it, I don't care if I do say it—because I'm in love."

Madge laughed at my confusion, and asked, "With money?"

"No," I said. "With just the nicest, sweetest, prettiest girl in the world."

Madge took a look at me out of the corner of her eye, and remarked, "It must be breakfast time."

Considering that it was about six-thirty, I wanted to ask who was telling a taradiddle now; but I resisted the temptation, and replied—

"No. And I promise not to bother you about my private affairs any more."

Madge laughed again merrily, saying, "You are the most obvious man I ever met. Now why did you say that?"

"I thought you were making breakfast an excuse," I said, "because you didn't like the subject."

"Yes, I was," said Madge, frankly. "Tell me about the girl you are engaged to."

I was so taken back that I stopped in my walk, and merely looked at her.

"For instance," she asked coolly, when she saw that I was speechless, "what does she look like?"

"Like, like—" I stammered, still embarrassed by this bold carrying of the war into my own camp—"like an angel."

"Oh," said Madge, eagerly, "I've always wanted to know what angels were like. Describe her to me."

"Well," I said, getting my second wind, so to speak, "she has the bluest eyes I've ever seen. Why, Miss Cullen, you said you'd never seen anything so blue as the sky yesterday; but even the atmosphere of 'rainless Arizona' has to take a back seat when her eyes are round. And they are just like the atmosphere out here. You can look into them for a hundred miles, but you can't get to the bottom."

"The Arizona sky is wonderful," said Madge. "How do the scientists account for it?"

I wasn't going to have my description of Miss Cullen side-tracked, for, since she had given me the chance, I wanted her to know just what I thought of her. Therefore I didn't follow lead on the Arizona skies, but went on—

"And I really think her hair is just as beautiful as her eyes. It's light brown, very curly, and—"

"Her complexion!" exclaimed Madge. "Is she a mulatto? And, if so, how can a complexion be curly?"

"Her complexion," I said, not a bit rattled, "is another great beauty of hers. She has one of those skins—"

"Furs are out of fashion at present," she interjected, laughing wickedly.

"Now look here, Miss Cullen," I cried indignantly, "I'm not going to let even you make fun of her."

"I can't help it," she laughed, "when you look so serious and intense."

"It's something I feel intense about, Miss Cullen," I said, not a little pained, I confess, at the way she was joking. I don't mind a bit being laughed at, but Miss Cullen knew, about as well as I, whom I was talking about, and it seemed to me she was laughing at my love for her. Under this impression I went on, "I suppose it is funny to you; probably so many men have been in love with you that a man's love for a woman has come to mean very little in your eyes. But out here we don't make a joke of love, and when we care for a woman we care—well, it's not to be put in words, Miss Cullen."

"I really didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Mr. Gordon," said Madge, gently, and quite serious now. "I ought not to have tried to tease you."

"There!" I said, my irritation entirely gone. "I had no right to lose my temper, and I'm sorry I spoke so unkindly. The truth is, Miss Cullen, the girl I care for is in love with another man, and so I'm bitter and ill-natured in these days."

My companion stopped walking at the steps of 218, and asked, "Has she told you so?"

"No," I answered. "But it's as plain as she's pretty."

Madge ran up the steps and opened the door of the car. As she turned to close it, she looked down at me with the oddest of expressions, and said—

"How dreadfully ugly she must be!"

CHAPTER X

WAITING FOR HELP

If ever a fellow was bewildered by a single speech, it was Richard Gordon. I walked up and down that platform till I was called to breakfast, trying to decide what Miss Cullen had meant to express, only to succeed in reading fifty different meanings into her parting six words. I wanted to think that it was her way of suggesting that I deceived myself in thinking that there was anything between Lord Ralles and herself; but, though I wished to believe this, I had seen too much to the contrary to take stock in the idea. Yet I couldn't believe that Madge was a coquette; I became angry and hot with myself for even thinking it for a moment.

Puzzle as I did over the words, I managed to eat a good breakfast, and then went into the Cullens' car and electrified the party by telling them of Camp's and Fred's despatches, and how I had come to overhear the former. Mr. Cullen and Albert couldn't say enough about my cleverness in what had really been pure luck, and seemed to think I had sat up all night in order to hear that telegram. The person for whose opinion I cared the most—Miss Cullen—didn't say anything, but she gave me a look that set my heart beating like a trip-hammer and made me put the most hopeful construction on that speech of hers. It seemed impossible that she didn't care for Lord Ralles, and that she might care for me; but, after having had no hope whatsoever, the smallest crumb of a chance nearly lifted me off my feet.

We had a consultation over what was best to be done, but didn't reach any definite conclusion till the station-agent brought me a telegram from the Postmaster-General. Breaking it open, I read aloud—

"Do not allow service of writ, and retain possession of letters according to prior instructions. At the request of this department, the Secretary of War has directed the commanding officer at Fort Whipple to furnish you with military protection, and you will call upon him at once, if in your judgment it is necessary. On no account surrender United States property to Territorial authorities. Keep Department notified."

"Oh, splendid!" cried Madge, clapping her hands.

"Mr. Camp will find that other people can give surprise parties as well as himself," I said cheerfully.

"You'll telegraph at once?" asked Mr. Cullen.

"Instantly," I said, rising, and added, "Don't you want to see what I say, Miss Cullen?"

"Of course I do," she cried, jumping up eagerly.

Lord Ralles scowled as he said, "Yes; let's see what Mr. Superintendent has to say."

"You needn't trouble yourself," I remarked, but he followed us into the station. I was disgusted, but at the same time it seemed to me that he had come because he was jealous; and that wasn't an unpleasant thought. Whatever his motive, he was a third party in the writing of that telegram, and had to stand by while Miss Cullen and I discussed and draughted it. I didn't try to make it any too brief, not merely asking for a guard and when I might expect it, but giving as well a pretty full history of the case, which was hardly necessary.

"You'll bankrupt yourself," laughed Madge. "You must let us pay."

"I'll let you pay, Miss Cullen, if you want," I offered. "How much is it, Welply?" I asked, shoving the blanks in to the operator.

"Nothin' for a lady," said Welply, grinning.

"There, Miss Cullen," I asked, "does the East come up to that in gallantry?"

"Do you really mean that there is no charge?" demanded Madge, incredulously, with her purse in her hand.

"That's the size of it," said the operator.

"Im not going to believe that!" cried Madge. "I know you are only deceiving me, and I really want to pay."

I laughed as I said, "Sometimes railroad superintendents can send messages free, Miss Cullen."

"How silly of me!" exclaimed Madge. Then she remarked, "How nice it is to be a railroad superintendent, Mr. Gordon! I should like to be one myself."

That speech really lifted me off my feet, but while I was thinking what response to make, I came down to earth with a bounce.

"Since the telegram's done," said Lord Ralles to Miss Cullen, in a cool, almost commanding tone, "suppose we take a walk."

"I don't think I care to this morning," answered Madge.

"I think you had better," insisted his lordship, with such a manner that I felt inclined to knock him down.

To my surprise, Madge seemed to hesitate, and finally said, "I'll walk up and down the platform, if you wish."

Lord Ralles nodded, and they went out, leaving me in a state of mingled amazement and rage at the way he had cut me out. Try as I would, I wasn't able to hit upon any theory that supplied a solution to the conduct of either Lord Ralles or Miss Cullen, unless they were engaged and Miss Cullen displeased him by her behavior to me. But Madge seemed such an honest, frank girl that I'd have believed anything sooner than that she was only playing with me.

If I was perplexed, I wasn't going to give Lord Ralles the right of way, and as soon as I had made certain that the telegram was safely started I joined the walkers. I don't think any of us enjoyed the hour that followed, but I didn't care how miserable I was myself, so long as I was certain that I was blocking Lord Ralles; and his grumpiness showed very clearly that my presence did that. As for Madge, I couldn't make her out. I had always thought I understood women a little, but her conduct was beyond understanding.

Apparently Miss Cullen didn't altogether relish her position, for presently she said she was going to the car. "I'm sure you and Lord Ralles will be company enough for each other," she predicted, giving me a flash of her eyes which showed them full of suppressed merriment, even while her face was grave.

In spite of her prediction, the moment she was gone Lord Ralles and I pulled apart about as quickly as a yard-engine can split a couple of cars.

I moped around for an hour, too unsettled mentally to do anything but smoke, and only waiting for an invitation or for some excuse to go into 218. About eleven o'clock I obtained the latter in another telegram, and went into the car at once.

"Telegram received," I read triumphantly. "A detail of two companies of the Twelfth Cavalry, under the command of Captain Singer, is ordered to Ash Fork, and will start within an hour, arriving at five o'clock. C. D. OLMSTEAD, Adjutant."

"That won't do, Gordon," cried Mr. Cullen. "The mandamus will be here before that."

"Oh, don't say there is something more wrong!" sighed Madge.

"Won't it be safer to run while there is still time?" suggested Albert, anxiously.

"I was born lazy about running away," I said.

"Oh, but please, just for once," Madge begged. "We know already how brave you are."

I thought for a moment, not so much objecting, in truth, to the running away as to the running away from Madge.

"I'd do it for you," I said, looking at Miss Cullen so that she understood this time what I meant, without my using any emphasis, "but I don't see any need of making myself uncomfortable, when I can make the other side so. Come along and see if my method isn't quite as good."

We went to the station, and I told the operator to call Rock Butte; then I dictated:

"Direct conductor of Phœnix No. 3 on its arrival at Rock Butte to hold it there till further orders. RICHARD GORDON, Superintendent."

"That will save my running and their chasing," I laughed; "though I'm afraid a long wait in Rock Butte won't improve their tempers."

The next few hours were pretty exciting ones to all of us, as can well be imagined. Most of the time was spent, I have to confess, in manœuvres and struggles between Lord Ralles and myself as to which should monopolize Madge, without either of us succeeding. I was so engrossed with the contest that I forgot all about the passage of time, and only when the sheriff strolled up to the station did I realize that the climax was at hand. As a joke I introduced him to the Cullens and we all stood chatting till far out on the hill to the south I saw a cloud of dust and quietly called Miss Cullen's attention to it. She and I went to 97 for my field-glasses, and the moment Madge looked through them she cried—

"Yes, I can see horses, and, oh, there are the stars and stripes! I don't think I ever loved them so much before."

"I suppose we civilians will have to take a back seat now, Miss Cullen?" I said; and she answered me with a demure smile worth—well, I'm not going to put a value on that smile.

"They'll be here very quickly," she almost sang.

"You forget the clearness of the air," I said, and then asked the sheriff how far away the dust-cloud was.

"Yer mean that cattle-drive?" he asked. "'Bout ten miles."

"You seem to think of everything," exclaimed Miss Cullen, as if my knowing that distances are deceptive in Arizona was wonderful. I sometimes think one gets the most praise in this world for what least deserves it.

I waited half an hour to be safe, and then released No. 3, just as we were called to luncheon; and this time I didn't refuse the invitation to eat mine in 218.

We didn't hurry over the meal, and toward the end I took to looking at my watch, wondering what could keep the cavalry from arriving.

"I hope there is no danger of the train arriving first, is there?" asked Madge.

"Not the slightest," I assured her. "The train won't be here for an hour, and the cavalry had only five miles to cover forty minutes ago. I must say, they seem to be taking their time."

"There they are now!" cried Albert.

Listening, we heard the clatter of horses' feet, going at a good pace, and we all rose and went to the windows, to see the arrival. Our feelings can be judged when across the tracks came only a mob of thirty or forty cowboys, riding in their usual "show-off" style.

"The deuce!" I couldn't help exclaiming, in my surprise. "Are you sure you saw a flag, Miss Cullen?"

"Why—I—thought—" she faltered. "I saw something red, and—I supposed of course—"

Not waiting to let her finish, I exclaimed, "There's been a fluke somewhere, I'm afraid; but we are still in good shape, for the train can't possibly be here under an hour. I'll get my field-glasses and have another look before I decide what—"

My speech was interrupted by the entrance of the sheriff and Mr. Camp!

CHAPTER XI

THE LETTERS CHANGE HANDS AGAIN

What seemed at the moment an incomprehensible puzzle had, as we afterward learned, a very simple explanation. One of the G. S. directors, Mr. Baldwin, who had come in on Mr. Camp's car, was the owner of a great cattle-ranch near Rock Butte. When the train had been held at that station for a few minutes, Camp went to the conductor, demanded the cause for the delay, and was shown my telegram. Seeing through the device, the party had at once gone to this ranch, where the owner, Baldwin, mounted them, and it was their dust-cloud we had seen as they rode up to Ash Fork. To make matters more serious, Baldwin had rounded up his cowboys and brought them along with him, in order to make any resistance impossible.

I made no objection to the sheriff serving the paper, though it nearly broke my heart to see Madge's face. To cheer her I said, suggestively, "They've got me, but they haven't got the letters, Miss Cullen. And, remember, it's always darkest before the dawn, and the stars in their courses are against Sisera."

With the sheriff and Mr. Camp I then walked over to the saloon, where Judge Wilson was waiting to dispose of my case. Mr. Cullen and Albert tried to come too, but all outsiders were excluded by order of the "court." I was told to show cause why I should not forthwith produce the letters, and answered that I asked an adjournment of the case so that I might be heard by counsel. It was denied, as was to have been expected; indeed, why they took the trouble to go through the forms was beyond me. I told Wilson I should not produce the letters, and he asked if I knew what that meant. I couldn't help laughing and retorting—

"It very appropriately means 'contempt of the court,' your honor."

"I'll give you a stiff term, young man," he said.

"It will take just one day to have habeas corpus proceedings in a United States court, and one more to get the papers here," I rejoined pleasantly.

Seeing that I understood the moves too well to be bluffed, the judge, Mr. Camp, and the lawyer held a whispered consultation. My surprise can be imagined when, at its conclusion, Mr. Camp said—

"Your honor, I charge Richard Gordon with being concerned in the holding up of the Missouri Western Overland No. 3 on the night of October 14, and ask that he be taken into custody on that charge."

I couldn't make out this new move, and puzzled over it, while Judge Wilson ordered my commitment. But the next step revealed the object, for the lawyer then asked for a search-warrant to look for stolen property. The judge was equally obliging, and began to fill one out on the instant.

This made me feel pretty serious, for the letters were in my breast-pocket, and I swore at my own stupidity in not having put them in the station safe when I had first arrived at Ash Fork. There weren't many moments in which to think while the judge scribbled away at the warrant, but in what time there was I did a lot of head-work, without, however, finding more than one way out of the snarl. And when I saw the judge finish off his signature with a flourish, I played a pretty desperate card.

"You're just too late, gentlemen," I said, pointing out the side window of the saloon. "There come the cavalry."

The three conspirators jumped to their feet and bolted for the window; even the sheriff turned to look. As he did so I gave him a shove toward the three which sent them all sprawling on the floor in a pretty badly mixed-up condition. I made a dash for the door, and as I went through it I grabbed the key and locked them in. When I turned to do so I saw the lot struggling up from the floor, and, knowing that it wouldn't take them many seconds to find their way out through the window, I didn't waste much time in watching them.

Camp, Baldwin, and the judge had left their horses just outside the saloon, and there they were still patiently standing, with their bridles thrown over their heads, as only Western horses will stand. It didn't take me long to have those bridles back in place, and as I tossed each over the peak of the Mexican saddle I gave two of the ponies slaps which started them off at a lope across the railroad tracks. I swung myself into the saddle of the third, and flicked him with the loose ends of the bridle in a way which made him understand that I meant business.

Baldwin's cowboys had most of them scattered to the various saloons of the place, but two of them were standing in the door-way of a store. I acted so quickly, however, that they didn't seem to take in what I was about till I was well mounted. Then I heard a yell, and fearing that they might shoot—for the cowboy does love to use his gun—I turned sharp at the saloon corner and rode up the side street, just in time to see Camp climbing through the window, with Baldwin's head in view behind him.

Before I had ridden a hundred feet I realized that I had a done-up horse under me, and, considering that he had covered over forty miles that afternoon in pretty quick time, it was not surprising that there wasn't very much go left in him. I knew that Baldwin's cowboys could get new mounts in plenty without wasting many minutes, and that then they would overhaul me in very short order. Clearly there was no use in my attempting to escape by running. And, as I wasn't armed, my only hope was to beat them by some finesse.

Ash Fork, like all Western railroad towns, is one long line of buildings running parallel with the railway tracks. Two hundred feet, therefore, brought me to the edge of the town, and I wheeled my pony and rode down behind the rear of the buildings. In turning, I looked back, and saw half a dozen mounted men already in pursuit, but I lost sight of them the next moment. As soon as I reached a street leading back to the railroad I turned again, and rode toward it, my one thought being to get back, if possible, to the station, and put the letters into the railroad agent's safe.

When I reached the main street I saw that my hope was futile, for another batch of cowboys were coming in full gallop toward me, very thoroughly heading me off in that direction. To escape them, I headed up the street away from the station, with the pack in close pursuit. They yelled at me to hold up, and I expected every moment to hear the crack of revolvers, for the poorest shot among them would have found no difficulty in dropping my horse at that distance if they had wanted to stop me. It isn't a very nice sensation to keep your ears pricked up in expectation of hearing the shooting begin, and to know that any moment may be your last. I don't suppose I was on the ragged edge more than thirty seconds, but they were enough to prove to me that to keep one's back turned to an enemy as one runs away takes a deal more pluck than to stand up and face his gun. Fortunately for me, my pursuers felt so sure of my capture that not one of them drew a bead on me.

The moment I saw that there was no escape, I put my hand in my breast-pocket and took out the letters, intending to tear them into a hundred pieces. But as I did so I realized that to destroy United States mail not merely entailed criminal liability, but was off color morally. I faltered, balancing the outwitting of Camp against State's prison, the doing my best for Madge against the wrong of it. I think I'm as honest a fellow as the average, but I have to confess that I couldn't decide to do right till I thought that Madge wouldn't want me to be dishonest, even for her.

I turned across the railroad tracks, and cut in behind some freight-cars that were standing on a siding. This put me out of view of my pursuers for a moment, and in that instant I stood up in my stirrups, lifted the broad leather flap of the saddle, and tucked the letters underneath it, as far in as I could force them. It was a desperate place in which to hide them, but the game was a desperate one at best, and the very boldness of the idea might be its best chance of success.

I was now heading for the station over the ties, and was surprised to see Fred Cullen with Lord Ralles on the tracks up by the special, for my mind had been so busy in the last hour that I had forgotten that Fred was due. The moment I saw him, I rode toward him, pressing my pony for all he was worth. My hope was that I might get time to give Fred the tip as to where the letters were; but before I was within speaking distance Baldwin came running out from behind the station, and, seeing me, turned, called back and gesticulated, evidently to summon some cowboys to head me off. Afraid to shout anything which should convey the slightest clue as to the whereabouts of the letters, as the next best thing I pulled a couple of old section reports from my pocket, intending to ride up and run into my car, for I knew that the papers in my hand would be taken to be the wanted letters, and that if I could only get inside the car even for a moment the suspicion would be that I had been able to hide them. Unfortunately, the plan was no sooner thought of than I heard the whistle of a lariat, and before I could guard myself the noose settled over my head. I threw the papers toward Fred and Lord Ralles, shouting, "Hide them!" Fred was quick as a flash, and, grabbing them off the ground, sprang up the steps of my car and ran inside, just escaping a bullet from my pursuers. I tried to pull up my pony, for I did not want to be jerked off, but I was too late, and the next moment I was lying on the ground in a pretty well shaken and jarred condition, surrounded by a lot of men.

CHAPTER XII

AN EVENING IN JAIL

Before my ideas had had time to straighten themselves out, I was lifted to my feet, and half pushed, half lifted to the station platform. Camp was already there, and as I took this fact in I saw Frederic and his lordship pulled through the doorway of my car by the cowboys and dragged out on the platform beside me. The reports were now in Lord Ralles's hands.

"That's what we want, boys," cried Camp. "Those letters."

"Take your hands off me," said Lord Ralles, coolly, "and I'll give them to you."

The men who had hold of his arms let go of him, and quick as a flash Ralles tore the papers in two. He tried to tear them once more, but, before he could do so, half a dozen men were holding him, and the papers were forced out of his hands.

Albert Cullen—for all of them were on the platform of 218 by this time—shouted, "Well done, Ralles!" quite forgetting in the excitement of the moment his English accent and drawl.

Apparently Camp didn't agree with him, for he ripped out a string of oaths which he impartially divided among Ralles, the cowboys, and myself. I was decidedly sorry that I hadn't given the real letters, for his lordship clearly had no scruple about destroying them, and I knew few men whom I would have seen behind prison-bars with as little personal regret. However, no one had, so far as I could see, paid the slightest attention to the pony, and the probabilities were that he was already headed for Baldwin's ranch, with no likelihood of his stopping till he reached home. At least that was what I hoped; but there were a lot of ponies standing about, and, not knowing the markings of the one I had ridden, I wasn't able to tell whether he might not be among them.

Just as the fragments of the papers were passed over to Mr. Camp, he was joined by Baldwin and the judge, and Camp held the torn pieces up to them, saying—

"They've torn the proxies in two."

"Don't let that trouble you," said the judge. "Make an affidavit before me, reciting the manner in which they were destroyed, and I'll grant you a mandamus compelling the directors to accept them as bona-fide proxies. Let me see how much injured they are."

Camp unfolded the papers, and I chuckled to myself at the look of surprise that overspread his face as he took in the fact that they were nothing but section reports. And, though

I don't like cuss-words, I have to acknowledge that I enjoyed the two or three that he promptly ejaculated.

When the first surprise of the trio was over, they called on the sheriff, who arrived opportunely, to take us into 97 and search the three of us—a proceeding that puzzled Fred and his lordship not a little, for they weren't on to the fact that the letters hadn't been recovered. I presume the latter will some day write a book dwelling on the favorite theme of the foreigner, that there is no personal privacy in America, and I don't know but his experiences justify the view. The running remarks as the search was made seemed to open Fred's eyes, for he looked at me with a puzzled air, but I winked and frowned at him, and he put his face in order.

When the papers were not found on any of us, Camp and Baldwin both nearly went demented. Baldwin suggested that I had never had the papers, but Camp argued that Fred or Lord Ralles must have hidden them in the car, in spite of the fact that the cowboys who had caught them insisted that they couldn't have had time to hide the papers. Anyway, they spent an hour in ferreting about in my car, and even searched my two darkies, on the possibility that the true letters had been passed on to them.

While they were engaged in this, I was trying to think out some way of letting Mr. Cullen and Albert know where the letters were. The problem was to suggest the saddle to them, without letting the cowboys understand, and by good luck I thought I had the means. Albert had complained to me the day we had ridden out to the Indian dwellings at Flagstaff that his saddle fretted some galled spots which he had chafed on his trip to Moran's Point. Hoping he would "catch on," I shouted to him—

"How are your sore spots, Albert?"

He looked at me in a puzzled way, and called, "Aw, I don't understand you."

"Those sore spots you complained about to me the day before yesterday," I explained.

He didn't seem any the less befogged as he replied, "I had forgotten all about them."

"I've got a touch of the same trouble," I went on; "and, if I were you, I'd look into the cause."

Albert only looked very much mystified, and I didn't dare say more, for at this point the trio, with the sheriff, came out of my car. If I hadn't known that the letters were safe, I could have read the story in their faces, for more disgusted and angry-looking men I have rarely seen.

They had a talk with the sheriff, and then Fred, Lord Ralles, and I were marched off by the official, his lordship loudly demanding sight of a warrant, and protesting against the illegality of his arrest, varied at moments by threats to appeal to the British consul, minister plenipo., her Majesty's Foreign Office, etc., all of which had about as much influence on the sheriff and his cowboy assistants as a Moqui Indian snake-dance would have in stopping a runaway engine. I confess to feeling a certain grim satisfaction in the fact that if I was to be shut off from seeing Madge, the Britisher was in the same box with me.

Ash Fork, though only six years old, had advanced far enough toward civilization to have a small jail, and into that we were shoved. Night was come by the time we were lodged there, and, being in pretty good appetite, I struck the sheriff for some grub.

"I'll git yer somethin'," he said, good-naturedly; "but next time yer shove people, Mr. Gordon, just quit shovin' yer friends. My shoulder feels like—" perhaps it's just as well not to say what his shoulder felt like. The Western vocabulary is expressive, but at times not quite fit for publication.

The moment the sheriff was gone, Fred wanted the mystery of the letters explained, and I told him all there was to tell, including as good a description of the pony as I could give him. We tried to hit on some plan to get word to those outside, but it wasn't to be done. At least it was a point gained that some one of our party besides myself knew where the letters were.

The sheriff returned presently with a loaf of canned bread and a tin of beans. If I had been alone, I should have kicked at the food and got permission for my darkies to send me up something from 97; but I thought I'd see how Lord Ralles would like genuine Western fare, so I said nothing. That, I have to state, is more—or rather less—than the Britisher did, after he had sampled the stuff; and really I don't blame him, much as I enjoyed his rage and disgust.

It didn't take long to finish our supper, and then Fred, who hadn't slept much the night before, stretched out on the floor and went to sleep. Lord Ralles and I sat on boxes—the only furniture the room contained—about as far apart as we could get, he in the sulks, and I whistling cheerfully. I should have liked to be with Madge, but he wasn't; so there was some compensation, and I knew that time was playing the cards in our favor: so long as they hadn't found the letters we had only to sit still to win.

About an hour after supper, the sheriff came back and told me Camp and Baldwin wanted to see me. I saw no reason to object, so in they came, accompanied by the judge. Baldwin opened the ball by saying genially—

"Well, Mr. Gordon, you've played a pretty cute gamble, and I suppose you think you stand to win the pot."

"I'm not complaining," I said.

"Still," snarled Camp, angrily, as if my contented manner fretted him, "our time will come presently, and we can make it pretty uncomfortable for you. Illegal proceedings put a man in jail in the long run."

"I hope you take your lesson to heart," I remarked cheerfully, which made Camp scowl worse than ever.

"Now," said Baldwin, who kept cool, "we know you are not risking loss of position and the State's prison for nothing, and we want to know what there is in it for you?"

"I wouldn't stake my chance of State's prison against yours, gentlemen. And, while I may lose my position, I'll be a long way from starvation."

"That doesn't tell us what Cullen gives you to take the risk."

"Mr. Cullen hasn't given, or even hinted that he'll give, anything."

"And Mr. Gordon hasn't asked, and, if I know him, wouldn't take a cent for what he has done," said Fred, rising from the floor.

"You mean to say you are doing it for nothing?" exclaimed Camp, incredulously.

"That's about the truth of it," I said; though I thought of

Madge as I said it, and felt guilty in suggesting that she was nothing.

"Then what is your motive?" cried Baldwin.

If there had been any use, I should have replied, "The right;" but I knew that they would only think I was posing if I said it. Instead I replied: "Mr. Cullen's party has the stock majority in their favor, and would have won a fair fight if you had played fair. Since you didn't, I'm doing my best to put things to right."

Camp cried, "All the more fool—" but Baldwin interrupted him by saying—

"That only shows what a mean cuss Cullen is. He ought to give you ten thousand, if he gives you a cent."

"Yes," cried Camp, "those letters are worth money, whether he's offered it or not."

"Mr. Cullen never so much as hinted paying me," said I.

"Well, Mr. Gordon," said Baldwin, suavely, "we'll show you that we can be more liberal. Though the letters rightfully belong to Mr. Camp, if you'll deliver them to us we'll see that you don't lose your place, and we'll give you five thousand dollars."

I glanced at Fred, whom I found looking at me anxiously, and asked him—

"Can't you do better than that?"

"We could with any one but you," said Fred.

I should have liked to shake hands over this compliment, but I only nodded, and turning to Mr. Camp, said—

"You see how mean they are."

"You'll find we are not built that way," said Baldwin. "Five thousand isn't a bad day's work, eh?"

"No," I said, laughing; "but you just told me I ought to get ten thousand if I got a cent."

"It's worth ten to Mr. Cullen, but—"

I interrupted by saying, "If it's worth ten to him, it's worth a hundred to me."

That was too much for Camp. First he said something best omitted, and then went on, "I told you it was waste of time trying to win him over."

The three stood apart for a moment whispering, and then Judge Wilson called the sheriff over, and they all went out together. The moment we were alone, Frederic held out his hand, and said—

"Gordon, it's no use saying anything, but if we can ever do—"

I merely shook hands, but I wanted the worst way to say—

"Tell Madge what I've done, and the thing's square."

CHAPTER XIII

A LESSON IN POLITENESS

Within five minutes we had a big surprise, for the sheriff and Mr. Baldwin came back, and the former announced that Fred and Lord Ralles were free, having been released on bail. When we found that Baldwin had gone on the bond, I knew that there was a scheme of some sort in the move, and, taking Fred aside, I warned him against trying to recover the proxies.

"They probably think that one or the other of you knows where the letters are hidden," I whispered, "and they'll keep a watch on you; so go slow."

He nodded, and followed the sheriff and Lord Ralles out.

The moment they were gone, Mr. Camp said, "I came back to give you a last chance.

"That's very good of you," I said.

"I warn you," he muttered threateningly, "we are not men to be beaten. There are fifty cowboys of Baldwin's in this town, who think you were concerned in the holding up. By merely tipping them the wink, they'll have you out of this, and after they've got you outside I wouldn't give the toss of a nickel for your life. Now, then, will you hand over those letters, or will you go to —— inside of ten minutes?"

I lost my temper in turn. "I'd much prefer going to some place where I was less sure of meeting you," I retorted; "and as for the cowboys, you'll have to be as tricky with them as you want to be with me before you'll get them to back you up in your dirty work."

At this point the sheriff called back to ask Camp if he was coming.

"All right," cried Camp, and went to the door. "This is the last call," he snarled, pausing for a moment on the threshold.

"I hope so," said I, more calmly in manner than in feeling, I have to acknowledge, for I didn't like the look of things. That they were in earnest I felt pretty certain, for I understood now why they had let my companions out of jail. They knew that angry cowboys were a trifle undiscriminating, and didn't care to risk hanging more than was necessary.

A long time seemed to pass after they were gone, but in reality it wasn't more than fifteen minutes before I heard some one steal up and softly unlock the door. I confess the evident endeavor to do it quietly gave me a scare, for it seemed to me it couldn't be an above-board movement. Thinking this, I picked up the box on which I had been sitting and prepared to make the best fight I could. It was a good deal of relief, therefore, when the door opened just wide enough for a man to put in his head, and I heard the sheriff's voice say, softly—

"Hi, Gordon!"

I was at the door in an instant, and asked—

"What's up?"

"They're gettin' the fellers together, and sayin' that yer shot a woman in the hold-up."

"It's an infernal lie," I said.

"Sounds that way to me," assented the sheriff; "but two-thirds of the boys are drunk, and it's a long time since they've had any fun."

"Well," I said, as calmly as I could, "are you going to stand by me?"

"I would, Mr. Gordon," he replied, "if there was any good, but there ain't time to get a posse, and what's one Winchester against a mob of cowboys like them?"

"If you'll lend me your gun," I said, "I'll show just what it is worth, without troubling you."

"I'll do better than that," offered the sheriff, "and that's what I'm here for. Just sneak, while there's time."

"You mean—?" I exclaimed.

"That's it. I'm goin' away, and I'll leave the door unlocked. If yer get clear let me know yer address, and later, if I want yer, I'll send yer word." He took a grip on my fingers that numbed them as if they had been caught in an air-brake, and disappeared.

I slipped out after the sheriff without loss of time. That there wasn't much to spare was shown by a crowd with some torches down the street, collected in front of a saloon. They were making a good deal of noise, even for the West; evidently the flame was being fanned. Not wasting time, I struck for the railroad, because I knew the geography of that best, but still more because I wanted to get to the station. It was a big risk to go there, but it was one I was willing to take for the object I had in view, and, since I had to take it, it was safest to get through with the job before the discovery was made that I was no longer in jail.

It didn't take me three minutes to reach the station. The whole place was black as a coal-dumper, except for the slices of light which shone through the cracks of the curtained windows in the specials, the dim light of the lamp in the station, and the glow of the row of saloons two hundred feet away. I was afraid, however, that there might be a spy lurking somewhere, for it was likely that Camp would hope to get some clue of the letters by keeping a watch on the station and the cars. Thinking boldness the safest course, I walked on to the platform without hesitation, and went into the station. The "night man" was sitting in his chair, nodding, but he waked up the moment I spoke.

"Don't speak my name," I said, warningly, as he struggled to his feet; and then in the fewest possible words I told him what I wanted of him—to find if the pony I had ridden (Camp's or Baldwin's) was in town and, if so, to learn where it was, and to get the letters on the quiet from under the saddle-flap. I chose this man, first because I could trust him, and next, because I had only one of the Cullens as an alternative, and if any of them went sneaking round, it would be sure to attract attention. "The moment you have the letters, put them in the station safe," I ended, "and then get word to me."

"And where'll you be, Mr. Gordon?" asked the man.

"Is there any place about here that's a safe hiding spot for a few hours?" I asked. "I want to stay till I'm sure those letters are safe, and after that I'll steal on board the first train that comes along."

"Then you'll want to be near here," said the man. "I'll tell you, I've got just the place for you. The platform's boarded in all round, but I noticed one plank that's loose at one end, right at this nigh corner, and if you just pry it open enough to get in, and then pull the board in place, they'll never find you."

"That will do," I said; "and when the letters are safe, come out on the platform, walk up and down once, bang the door twice, and then say, 'That way freight is late.' And if you get a chance, tell one of the Cullens where I'm hidden."

I crossed the platform boldly, jumped down, and walked away. But after going fifty feet I dropped down on my hands and knees and crawled back. Inside of two minutes I was safely stowed away under the platform, in about as neat a hiding-place as a man could ask. In fact, if I had only had my wits enough about me to borrow a revolver of the man, I could have made a pretty good defence, even if discovered.

Underneath the platform was loose gravel, and, as an additional precaution, I scooped out, close to the side-boarding, a trough long enough for me to lie in. Then I got into the hole, shovelled the sand over my legs, and piled the rest up in a heap close to me, so that by a few sweeps of my arm I could cover my whole body, leaving only my mouth and nose exposed, and those below the level. That made me feel pretty safe, for, even if the cowboys found the loose plank and crawled in, it would take uncommon good eyesight, in the darkness, to find me. I had hollowed out my living grave to fit, and if I could have smoked, I should have been decidedly comfortable. Sleep I dared not indulge in, and the sequel showed that I was right in not allowing myself that luxury.

I hadn't much more than comfortably settled myself, and let thoughts of a cigar and a nap flit through my mind, when a row up the street showed that the jail-breaking had been discovered. Then followed shouts and confusion for a few moments, while a search was being organized. I heard some horsemen ride over the tracks, and also down the street, followed by the hurried footsteps of half a dozen men. Some banged at the doors of the specials, while others knocked at the station door.

One of the Cullens' servants opened the door of 218, and I heard the sheriff's voice telling him he'd got to search the car. The darky protested, saying that the "gentmun was all away, and only de miss inside." The row brought Miss Cullen to the door, and I heard her ask what was the matter.

"Sorry to trouble yer, miss," said the sheriff, "but a prisoner has broken jail, and we've got to look for him."

"Escaped!" cried Madge, joyfully. "How?"

"That's just what gits away with me," marvelled the sheriff. "My idee is—"

"Don't waste time on theories," said Camp's voice, angrily. "Search the car."

"Sorry to discommode a lady," apologized the sheriff, gallantly, "but if we may just look around a little?"

"My father and brothers went out a few minutes ago," said Madge, hesitatingly, "and I don't know if they would be willing."

Camp laughed angrily, and ordered, "Stand aside, there."

"Don't yer worry," said the sheriff. "If he's on the car, he can't git away. We'll send a feller up for Mr. Cullen, while we search Mr. Gordon's car and the station."

They set about it at once, and used up ten minutes in the task. Then I heard Camp say—

"Come, we can't wait all night for permission to search this car. Go ahead."

"I hope you'll wait till my father comes," begged Madge.

"Now go slow, Mr. Camp," said the sheriff: "We mustn't discomfort the lady if we can avoid it."

"I believe you're wasting time in order to help him escape," snapped Camp.

"Nothin' of the kind," denied the sheriff.

"If you won't do your duty, I'll take the law into my own hands, and order the car searched," sputtered Camp, so angry as hardly to be able to articulate.

"Look a here," growled the sheriff, "who are yer sayin' all this to anyway? If yer talkin' to me, say so right off."

"All I mean," hastily said Camp, "is that it's your duty, in your honorable position, to search this car."

"I don't need no instructin' in my dooty as sheriff," retorted the official. "But a bigger dooty is what is owin' to the feminine sex. When a female is in question, a gentleman, Mr. Camp—yes, sir, a gentleman—is in dooty bound to be perlite."

"Politeness be —— ——!" swore Camp.

"Git as angry as yer —— please," roared the sheriff wrathfully, "but —— my soul to —— if any —— —— cuss has a right to use such —— —— talk in the presence of a lady!"

CHAPTER XIV

"LISTENERS NEVER HEAR ANYTHING GOOD"

Before I had ceased chuckling over the sheriff's indignant declaration of the canons of etiquette, I heard Mr. Cullen's voice demanding to know what the trouble was, and it was quickly explained to him that I had escaped. He at once gave them permission to search his car, and went in with the sheriff and the cowboys. Apparently Madge went in too, for in a moment I heard Camp say, in a low voice—

"Two of you fellows get down below the car and crawl in under the truck where you can't be seen. Evidently that cuss isn't here, but he's likely to come by and by. If so, nab him if you can, and if you can't, fire two shots. Mosely, are you heeled?"

"Do I chaw terbaccy?" asked Mosely, ironically, clearly insulted at the suggestion that he would travel without a gun.

"Then keep a sharp lookout, and listen to everything you hear, especially the whereabouts of some letters. If you can spot their lay, crawl out and get word to me at once. Now, under you go before they come out."

I heard two men drop into the gravel close alongside of where I lay, and then crawl under the truck of 218. They weren't a moment too soon, for the next instant I heard two or three people jump on to the platform, and Albert Cullen's voice drawl, "Aw, by Jove, what's the row?" Camp not enlightening them, Lord Ralles suggested that they get on the car to find out, and the three did so. A moment later the sheriff came to the door and told Camp that I was not to be found.

"I told yer this was the last place to look for the cuss, Mr. Camp," he said. "We've just discomforted the lady for nothin'."

"Then we must search elsewhere," spoke up Camp. "Come on, boys."

The sheriff turned and made another elaborate apology for having had to trouble the lady.

I heard Madge tell him that he hadn't troubled her at all, and then, as the cowboys and Camp walked off, she added, "And, Mr. Gunton, I want to thank you for reproving Mr. Camp's dreadful swearing."

"Thank yer, miss," said the sheriff. "We fellers are a little rough at times, but —— me if we don't know what's due to a lady."

"Papa," said Madge, as soon as he was out of hearing, "the sheriff is the most beautiful swearer I ever heard."

For a while there was silence round the station; I suppose the party in 218 were comparing notes, while the two cowboys and I had the best reasons for being quiet. Presently, however, the men came out of the car and jumped down on the platform. Madge evidently followed them to the door, for she called, "Please let me know the moment something happens or you learn anything."

"Better go to bed, Madgy," Albert called. "You'll only worry, and it's after three."

"I couldn't sleep if I tried," she answered.

Their footsteps died away in a moment, and I heard her close the door of 218. In a few moments she opened it again, and, stepping down to the station platform, began to pace up and down it. If I had only dared, I could have put my finger through the crack of the planks and touched her foot as she walked over my head, but I was afraid it might startle her into a shriek, and there was no explaining to her what it meant without telling the cowboys how close they were to their quarry.

Madge hadn't walked from one end of the platform to the other more than three or four times, when I heard some one coming. She evidently heard it also, for she said—

"I began to be afraid you hadn't understood me."

"I thought you told me to see first if I were needed," responded a voice that even the distance and the planks did not prevent me from recognizing as that of Lord Ralles.

"Yes," said she. "You are sure you can be spared?"

"I couldn't be of the slightest use," asserted Ralles, getting on to the platform and joining Madge. "It's as black as ink everywhere, and I don't think there's anything to be done till daylight."

"Then I'm glad you came back, for I really want to say something—to ask the greatest favor of you."

"You only have to tell me what it is," said his lordship.

"Even that is very hard," murmured Madge. "If—if—Oh! I'm afraid I haven't the courage, after all."

"I'll be glad to do anything I can."

"It's—well— Oh, dear, I can't. Let's walk a little, while I think how to put it."

They began to walk, which took a weight off my mind, as I had been forced to hear every word thus far spoken, and was dreading what might follow, since I was perfectly helpless to warn them. The platform was built around the station, and in a moment they were out of hearing.

Before many seconds were over, however, they had walked round the building, and I heard Lord Ralles say—

"You really don't mean that he's insulted you?"

"That is just what I do mean," cried Madge, indignantly. "It's been almost past endurance. I haven't dared to tell any one, but he had the cruelty, the meanness, on Hance's trail to threaten that—"

At that point the walkers turned the corner again, and I could not hear the rest of the sentence. But I had heard more than enough to make me grow hot with mortification, even while I could hardly believe I had understood aright. Madge had been so kind to me lately that I couldn't think she had been feeling as bitterly as she spoke. That such an apparently frank girl was a consummate actress wasn't to be thought, and yet—I remembered how well she had played her part on Hance's trail; but even that wouldn't convince me. Proof of her duplicity came quickly enough, for, while I was still thinking, the walkers were round again, and Lord Ralles was saying—

"Why haven't you complained to your father or brothers?"

"Because I knew they would resent his conduct to me, and—"

"Of course they would," cried her companion, interrupting. "But why should you object to that?"

"Because of the letters," explained Madge. "Don't you see that if we made him angry he would betray us to Mr. Camp, and—"

Then they passed out of hearing, leaving me almost desperate, both at being an eavesdropper to such a conversation, and that Madge could think so meanly of me. To say it, too, to Lord Ralles made it cut all the deeper, as any fellow who had been in love will understand.

Round they came again in a moment, and I braced myself for the lash of the whip that I felt was coming. I didn't escape it, for Madge was saying—

"Can you conceive of a man pretending to care for a girl and yet treating her so? I can't tell you the grief, the mortification, I have endured." She spoke with a half-sob in her throat, as if she was struggling not to cry, which made me wish I had never been born. "It's been all I could do to control myself in his presence, I have come so utterly to hate and despise him," she added.

"I don't wonder," growled Lord Ralles. "My only surprise is—"

With that they passed out of hearing again, leaving me fairly desperate with shame, grief, and, I'm afraid, with anger.

I felt at once guilty and yet wronged. I knew my conduct on the trail must have seemed to her ungentlemanly because I had never dared to explain that my action there had been a pure bluff, and that I wouldn't have really searched her for—well, for anything; but though she might think badly of me for that, yet I had done my best to counterbalance it, and was running big risks, both present and eventual, for Madge's sake. Yet here she was acknowledging that thus far she had used me as a puppet, while all the time disliking me. It was a terrible blow, made all the harder by the fact that she was proving herself such a different girl from the one I loved—so different, in fact, that, despite what I had heard, I couldn't quite believe it of her, and found myself seeking to extenuate and even justify her conduct. While I was doing this, they came within hearing, and Lord Ralles was speaking.

"—with you," he said. "But I still do not see what I can do, however much I may wish to serve you."

"Can't you go to him and insist that he—or tell him what I really feel toward him—or anything, in fact, to shame him? I really can't go on acting longer."

That reached the limit of my endurance, and I crawled from my burrow, intending to get out from under that platform, whether I was caught or not. I know it was a foolish move; after having heard what I had, a little more or less was quite immaterial. But I entirely forgot my danger, in the sting of what Madge had said, and my one thought was to stand face to face with her long enough to—I'm sure I don't know what I intended to say.

Just as I reached the plank, however, I heard Lord Ralles ask—

"Who's that?"

"It's me," said a voice,—"the station agent." Then I heard a door close. Some one walked out to the centre of the platform and remarked—

"That 'ere way freight is late."

At least the letters were recovered.

CHAPTER XV

THE SURRENDER OF THE LETTERS

If the letters were safe, that was a good deal more than I was. The moment the station-master had made his agreed-upon announcement, he said to the walkers—

"Had any news of Mr. Gordon?"

"No," replied Lord Ralles. "And, as the lights keep moving in the town, they must still be hunting for him."

"I reckon they'll do considerable more huntin' before they find him up there," chuckled the man, with a self-important manner. "He's hidden away under this ere platform."

"Not right here?" I heard Madge cry, but I had too much to do to take in what followed. I was lying close to the loose plank, and even before the station-master had completed his sentence I was squirming through the crack. As I freed my legs I heard two shots, which I knew was the signal given by the cowboys, followed by a shriek of fright from Madge, for which she was hardly to be blamed. I was on my feet in an instant and ran down the tracks at my best speed. It wasn't with much hope of escape, for once out from under the planking I found, what I had not before realized, that day was dawning, and already outlines at a distance could be seen. However, I was bound to do my best, and I did it.

Before I had run a hundred feet I could hear pursuers, and a moment later a revolver cracked, ploughing up the dust in front of me. Another bullet followed, and, seeing that affairs were getting desperate, I dodged round the end of some cars, only to plump into a man running at full speed. The collision was so unexpected that we both fell, and before I could get on my feet one of my pursuers plumped down on top of me and I felt something cold on the back of my neck.

"Lie still, yer sneakin' coyote of a road agent," said the man, "or I'll blow yer so full of lead that yer couldn't float in Salt Lake."

I preferred to take his advice, and lay quiet while the cowboys gathered. From all directions I heard them coming, calling to each other that "the skunk that shot the woman is corralled," and other forms of the same information. In a moment I was jerked to my feet, only to be swept off them with equal celerity, and was half carried, half dragged, along the tracks. It wasn't as rough handling as I have taken on the foot-ball-field, but I didn't enjoy it.

In a space of time that seemed only seconds, I was close to a telegraph-pole; but, brief as the moment had been, a fellow with a lariat tied round his waist was half-way up the post. I knew the mob had been told that I had killed a woman in the hold-up, for the cowboy, bad as he is, has his own standards, beyond which he won't go. But I might as well have tried to tell my innocence to the moon as to get them to listen to denials, even if I could have made my voice heard.

The lariat was dropped over the cross-piece, and as a man adjusted the noose a sudden silence fell. I thought it was a little sense of what they were doing, but it was merely due to the command of Baldwin, who, with Camp, stood just outside the mob.

"Let me say a word before you pull," he called, and then to me he said, "Now will you give up the property?"

I was pretty pale and shaky, but I come of stiffish stock, and I wouldn't have backed down then, it seemed to me, if they had been going to boil me alive. I suppose it sounds foolish, and if I had had plenty of time I have no doubt my common-sense would have made me crawl. Not having time, I was on the point of saying "No," when the door of 218, which lay about two hundred yards away, flew open, and out came Mr. Cullen, Fred, Albert, Lord Ralles, and Captain Ackland, all with rifles. Of course it was perfect desperation for the five to tackle the cowboys, but they were game to do it, all the same.

How it would have ended I don't know, but as they sprang off the car platform Miss Cullen came out on it, and stood there, one hand holding on to the door-way, as if she needed support, and the other covering her heart. It was too far for me to see her face, but the whole attitude expressed such suffering that it was terrible to see. What was more, her position put her in range of every shot the cowboys might fire at the five as they charged. If I could have stopped them I would have done so, but, since that was impossible, I cried—

"Mr. Camp, I'll surrender the letters."

"Hold on, boys," shouted Baldwin; "wait till we get the property he stole." And, coming through the crowd, he threw the noose off my neck.

"Don't shoot, Mr. Cullen," I yelled, as my friends halted and raised their rifles, and, fortunately, the cowboys had opened up enough to let them hear me and see that I was free of the rope.

Escorted by Camp, Baldwin, and the cowboys, I walked toward them. On the way Baldwin said, in a low voice, "Deliver the letters, and we'll tell the boys there has been a mistake. Otherwise—"

When we came up to the five, I called to them that I had agreed to surrender the letters. While I was saying it, Miss Cullen joined them, and it was curious to see how respectfully the cowboys took off their hats and fell back.

"You are quite right," Mr. Cullen called. "Give them the letters at once."

"Oh, do, Mr. Gordon," said Madge, still white and breathless with emotion. "The money is nothing. Don't think—" It was all she could say.

I felt pretty small, but with Camp and Baldwin, now reinforced by Judge Wilson, I went to the station, ordered the agent to open the safe, took out the three letters, and handed them to Mr. Camp, realizing how poor Madge must have felt on Hance's trail. It was a pretty big take down to my pride I tell you, and made all the worse by the way the three gloated over the letters and over our defeat.

"We've taught you a lesson, young man," sneered Camp, as after opening the envelopes, to assure himself that the proxies were all right, he tucked them into his pocket. "And we'll teach you another one after to-day's election."

Just as he concluded, we heard outside the first note of a bugle, and as it sounded "By fours, column left," my heart gave a big jump, and the blood came rushing to my face. Camp, Baldwin, and Wilson broke for the door, but I got there first, and prevented their escape. They tried to force their way through, but I hadn't blocked and interfered at football for nothing, and they might as well have tried to break through the Sierras. Discovering this, Camp whipped out his gun, and told me to let them out. Being used to the West, I recognized the goodness of the argument and stepped out on the platform, giving them free passage. But the twenty seconds I had delayed them had cooked their goose, for outside was a squadron of cavalry swinging a circle round the station; and we had barely reached the platform when the bugle sounded "Halt," quickly followed by "Forward left." As the ranks wheeled, and closed up as a solid line about us, I could have cheered with delight. There was a moment's dramatic hush, in which we could all hear the breathing of the winded horses, and then came the clatter of sword and spurs, as an officer sprang from his saddle.

"I want Richard Gordon," the officer called.

I responded, "At your service, and badly in need of yours, Captain Singer."

"Hope the delay hasn't spoilt things," said the captain. "We had a cursed fool of a guide, who took the wrong trail and ran us into Limestone Cañon, where we had to camp for the night."

I explained the situation as quickly as I could, and the captain's eyes gleamed. "I'd have given a bad quarter to have got here ten minutes sooner and ridden my men over those scoundrels," he muttered. "I saw them scatter as we rode up, and if I'd known what they'd been doing we'd have given them a volley." Then he walked over to Mr. Camp and said, "Give me those letters."

"I hold those letters by virtue of an order—" Camp began.

"Give me those letters," the captain interrupted.

"Do you intend a high-handed interference with the civil authorities?" Judge Wilson demanded.

"Come, come," said the captain, sternly. "You have taken forcible possession of United States property. Any talk about civil authorities is rubbish, and you know it."

"I will never—" cried Mr. Camp.

"Corporal Jackson, dismount a guard of six men," rang the captain's voice, interrupting him.

Evidently something in the voice or order convinced Mr. Camp, for the letters were hastily produced and given to Singer, who at once handed them to me. I turned with them to the Cullens, and, laughing, quoted, " 'All's well that ends well.' "

But they didn't seem to care a bit about the recovery of the letters, and only wanted to have a hand-shake all round over my escape. Even Lord Ralles said, "Glad we could be of a little service," and didn't refuse my thanks, though the deuce knows they were badly enough expressed, in my consciousness that I had done an ungentlemanly trick over those trousers of his, and that he had been above remembering it when I was in real danger. I'm ashamed enough to confess that when Miss Cullen held out her hand

I made believe not to see it. I'm a bad hand at pretending, and I saw Madge color up at my act.

The captain finally called me off to consult about our proceedings. I felt no very strong love for Camp, Baldwin, or Wilson, but I didn't see that a military arrest would accomplish anything, and after a little discussion it was decided to let them alone, as we could well afford to do, having won.

This matter decided, I said to the captain, "I'll be obliged if you'll put a guard round my car. And then, if you and your officers will come inside it, I have a—something in a bottle, recommended for removing alkali dust from the tonsils."

"Very happy to test your prescription," responded Singer, genially.

I started to go with him, but I couldn't resist turning to Mr. Camp and his friends and saying—

"Gentlemen, the G. S. is a big affair, but it isn't quite big enough to fight the U. S."

CHAPTER XVI

A GLOOMY GOOD-BY

At that point my importance ceased. Apparently seeing that the game was up, Mr. Camp later in the morning asked Mr. Cullen to give him an interview, and when he was allowed to pass the sentry he came to the steps and suggested—

"Perhaps we can arrange a compromise between the Missouri Western and the Great Southern?"

"We can try," Mr. Cullen assented. "Come into my car." He made way for Mr. Camp, and was about to follow him, when Madge took hold of her father's arm, and, making him stoop, whispered something to him.

"What kind of a place?" asked Mr. Cullen, laughing.

"A good one," his daughter replied.

I thought I understood what was meant. She didn't want to rest under an obligation, and so I was to be paid up for what I had done by promotion. It made me grit my teeth, and if I hadn't taught myself not to swear, because of my position, I could have given sheriff Gunton points on cursing. I wanted to speak up right there and tell Miss Cullen what I thought of her.

Of the interview which took place inside 218, I can speak only at second-hand, and the world knows about as well as I how the contest was compromised by the K. & A. being turned over to the Missouri Western, the territory in Southern California being divided between the California Central and the Great Southern, and a traffic arrangement agreed upon that satisfied the G. S. That afternoon a Missouri Western board for the K. & A. was elected without opposition, and they in turn elected Mr. Cullen president of the K. & A.; so when my report of the holding-up went in, he had the pleasure of reading it. I closed it with a request for instructions, but I never received any, and that ended the matter. I turned over the letters to the special agent at Flagstaff, and I suppose his report is slumbering in some pigeon-hole in Washington, for I should have known of any attempt to bring the culprits to punishment. Mr. Cullen had taken a big risk, but came out of it with a great lot of money, for the Missouri Western bought all his holdings in the K. & A. and C. C. But the scare must have taught him a lesson, for ever since then he's been conservative, and talks about the foolishness of investors who try to get more than five per cent, or who think of anything but good railroad bonds.

As for myself, a month after these occurrences I was appointed superintendent of the Missouri Western, which by this deal had become one of the largest railroad systems in the world. It was a big step up for so young a man, and was of course pure favoritism, due to Mr. Cullen's influence. I didn't stay in the position long, for within two years I was offered the presidency of the Chicago & St. Paul, and I think that was won on merit. Whether or not, I hold the position still, and have made my road earn and pay dividends right through the panic.

All this is getting away ahead of events, however. The election delayed us so that we couldn't couple on to No. 4

that afternoon, and consequently we had to lie that night at Ash Fork. I made the officers my excuse for keeping away from the Cullens, as I wished to avoid Madge. I did my best to be good company to the bluecoats, and had a first-class dinner for them on my car, but I was in a pretty glum mood, which even champagne couldn't modify. Though all necessity of a guard ceased with the compromise, the cavalry remained till the next morning, and, after giving them a good breakfast, about six o'clock we shook hands, the bugle sounded, and off they rode. For the first time I understood how a fellow disappointed in love comes to enlist.

When I turned about to go into my car, I found Madge standing on the platform of 218 waving a handkerchief. I paid no attention to her, and started up my steps.

"Mr. Gordon," she said—and when I looked at her I saw that she was flushing—"what is the matter?"

I suppose most fellows would have found some excuse, but for the life of me I couldn't. All I was able to say was—

"I would rather not say, Miss Cullen."

"How unfair you are!" she cried. "You—without the slightest reason you suddenly go out of your way to ill-treat—insult me, and yet will not tell me the cause."

That made me angry. "Cause?" I cried. "As if you didn't know of a cause! What you don't know is that I overheard your conversation with Lord Ralles night before last."

"My conversation with Lord Ralles?" exclaimed Madge, in a bewildered way.

"Yes," I said bitterly, "keep up the acting. The practice is good, even if it deceives no one."

"I don't understand a word you are saying," she retorted, getting angry in turn. "You speak as if I had done wrong—as if—I don't know what; and I have a right to know to what you allude."

"I don't see how I can be any clearer," I muttered. "I was under the station platform, hiding from the cowboys, while you and Lord Ralles were walking. I didn't want to be a listener, but I heard a good deal of what you said."

"But I didn't walk with Lord Ralles," she cried. "The only person I walked with was Captain Ackland."

That took me very much aback, for I had never questioned in my mind that it wasn't Lord Ralles. Yet the moment she spoke, I realized how much alike the two brothers' voices were, and how easily the blurring of distance and planking might have misled me. For a moment I was speechless. Then I replied coldly—

"It makes no difference with whom you were. What you said was the essential part."

"But how could you for an instant suppose that I could say what I did to Lord Ralles?" she demanded.

"I naturally thought he would be the one to whom you would appeal concerning my 'insulting' conduct."

Madge looked at me for a moment as if transfixed. Then she laughed, and cried—

"Oh, you idiot!"

While I still looked at her in equal amazement, she went on, "I beg your pardon, but you are so ridiculous that I had to say it. Why, I wasn't talking about you, but about Lord Ralles."

"Lord Ralles!" I cried.

"Yes."

"I don't understand," I exclaimed.

"Why, Lord Ralles has been—has been—oh, he's threatened that if I wouldn't—that—"

"You mean he—?" I began, and then stopped, for I couldn't believe my ears.

"Oh," she burst out, "of course you couldn't understand, and you probably despise me already, but if you knew how I scorn myself, Mr. Gordon, and what I have endured from that man, you would only pity me."

Light broke on me suddenly. "Do you mean, Miss Cullen," I cried hotly, "that he's been cad enough to force his attentions upon you by threats?"

"Yes. First he made me endure him because he was going to help us, and from the moment the robbery was done, he has been threatening to tell. Oh, how I have suffered!"

Then I said a very silly thing. "Miss Cullen," I groaned, "I'd give anything if I were only your brother." For the moment I really meant it.

"I haven't dared to tell any of them," she explained, "because I knew they would resent it and make Lord Ralles angry, and then he would tell, and so ruin papa. It seemed such a little thing to bear for his sake, but, oh, it's been— I suppose you despise me!"

"I never dreamed of despising you," I said. "I only thought, of course—seeing what I did—and—that you were fond— No—that is—I mean—well— The beast!" I couldn't help exclaiming.

"Oh," said Madge, blushing, and stammering breathlessly, "you mustn't think—there was really—you happened to—usually I managed to keep with papa or my brothers, or else run away, as I did when he interrupted my letter-writing—when you thought we had—but it was nothing of the—I kept away just—but the night of the robbery I forgot, and on the trail his mule blocked the path. He never—there really wasn't—you saved me the only time he—he—that he was really rude; and I am so grateful for it, Mr. Gordon."

I wasn't in a mood to enjoy even Miss Cullen's gratitude. Without stopping for words, I dashed into 218, and, going straight to Albert Cullen, I shook him out of a sound sleep, and before he could well understand me I was alternately swearing at him and raging at Lord Ralles.

Finally he got the truth through his head, and it was nuts to me, even in my rage, to see how his English drawl disappeared, and how quick he could be when he really became excited.

I left him hurrying into his clothes, and went to my car, for I didn't dare to see the exodus of Lord Ralles, through fear that I couldn't behave myself. Albert came into 97 in a few moments to say that the Englishmen were going to the hotel as soon as dressed, the captain having elected to stay by his brother.

"I wouldn't have believed it of Ralles. I feel jolly cut up, you know," he drawled.

I had been so enraged over Lord Ralles that I hadn't stopped to reckon in what position I stood myself toward Miss Cullen, but I didn't have to do much thinking to know that I had behaved about as badly as was possible for me. And the worst of it was that she could not know that right through the whole I had never quite been able to think badly of her.

I went out on the platform of the station, and was lucky enough to find her there alone.

"Miss Cullen," I said, "I've been ungentlemanly and suspicious, and I'm about as ashamed of myself as a man can be and not jump into the Grand Cañon. I've not come to you to ask your forgiveness, for I can't forgive myself, much less expect it of you. But I want you to know how I feel, and if there's any reparation, apology, anything, that you'd like, I'll—"

Madge interrupted my speech there by holding out her hand.

"You don't suppose," she said, "that, after all you have done for us, I could be angry over what was merely a mistake?"

That's what I call a trump of a girl, worth loving for a lifetime.

Well, we coupled on to No. 2 that morning and started East, this time Mr. Cullen's car being the "ender." All on 218 were wildly jubilant, as was natural, but I kept growing bluer and bluer. I took a farewell dinner on their car the night we were due in Albuquerque, and afterward Miss Cullen and I went out and sat on the back platform.

"I've had enough adventures to talk about for a year," Madge said, as we chatted the whole thing over, "and you can no longer brag that the K. & A. has never had a robbery, even if you didn't lose anything."

"I have lost something," I sighed sadly.

Madge looked at me quickly, started to speak, hesitated, and then said, "Oh, Mr. Gordon, if you only could know how badly I have felt about that, and how I appreciate the sacrifice."

I had only meant that I had lost my heart, and, for that matter, probably my head, for it would have been ungenerous even to hint to Miss Cullen that I had made any sacrifice of conscience for her sake, and I would as soon have asked her to pay for it in money as have told her.

"You mustn't think—" I began.

"I have felt," she continued, "that your wish to serve us made you do something you never would have otherwise done, for— Well, you—any one can see how truthful and honest—

and it has made me feel so badly that we— Oh, Mr. Gordon, no one has a right to do wrong in the world, for it brings such sadness and danger to innocent— And you have been so generous—"

I couldn't let this go on. "What I did," I told her, "was to fight fire with fire, and no one is responsible for it but myself."

"I should like to think that, but I can't," she said. "I know we all tried to do something dishonest, and while you didn't do any real wrong, yet I don't think you would have acted as you did except for our sake. And I'm afraid you may some day regret—"

"I sha'n't," I cried; "and, so far from meaning that I had lost my self-respect, I was alluding to quite another thing."

"Time?" she asked.

"No."

"What?"

"Something else you have stolen."

"I haven't," she denied.

"You have," I affirmed.

"You mean the novel?" she asked; "because I sent it in to 97 to-night."

"I don't mean the novel."

"I can't think of anything more but those pieces of petrified wood, and those you gave me," she said demurely. "I am sure that whatever else I have of yours you have given me without even my asking, and if you want it back you've only got to say so."

"I suppose that would be my very best course," I groaned.

"I hate people who force a present on one," she continued, "and then, just as one begins to like it, want it back."

Before I could speak, she asked hurriedly, "How often do you come to Chicago?"

I took that to be a sort of command that I was to wait, and though longing to have it settled then and there, I braked myself up and answered her question. Now I see what a duffer I was—Madge told me afterward that she asked only because she was so frightened and confused that she felt she must stop my speaking for a moment.

I did my best till I heard the whistle the locomotive gives as it runs into yard limits, and then rose. "Good-by, Miss Cullen," I said, properly enough, though no death-bed farewell was ever more gloomily spoken; and she responded, "Good-by, Mr. Gordon," with equal propriety.

I held her hand, hating to let her go, and the first thing I knew, I blurted out, "I wish I had the brass of Lord Ralles!"

"I don't," she laughed, "because, if you had, I shouldn't be willing to let you—"

And what she was going to say, and why she didn't say it, is the concern of no one but Mr. and Mrs. Richard Gordon.

The Risen Dead

BY MAX PEMBERTON

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CHAPTER I

THE sun was setting on the second day of June, in the year 1701, when Pietro Falier, the Captain of the Police of Venice, quitted his office in the Piazzetta of St. Mark and set out, alone, for the Palace of Frà Giovanni, the Capuchin friar, who lived over on the Island of the Guidecca.

"I shall return in an hour," he said to his subordinate as he stepped into the black gondola which every Venetian knew so well. "If any has need of me, I am at the house of Frà Giovanni."

The subordinate saluted, and returned slowly toward the ducal palace. He was thinking that his Captain went overmuch just then to the house of that strange friar who had come to Venice so mysteriously, and so mysteriously had won the favor of the republic.

"Saint John!" he muttered to himself, "that we should dance attendance on a shaven crown—we, who were the masters of the city a year ago! What is the Captain thinking of? Are we all women, then, or have women plucked our brains that it should be Frà Giovanni this and Frà Giovanni that, and your tongue snapped off if you so much as put a question. To the devil with all friars, say I."

The good fellow stopped a moment in his walk to lay the flat of his sword across the shoulders of a mountebank, who had dared to remain seated at the door of his booth while so great a person passed. Then he returned to his office, and whispered in the ear of his colleague the assurance that the Captain was gone again to the island of the Jews, and that his business was with the friar.

"And look you, Michele," said he, "it is neither to you nor to me that he comes nowadays. Not a whisper of it, as I live, except to this friar, whom I could crush between my fingers as a glass ball out of Murano."

His colleague shook his head.

"There have been many," said he, "who have tried to crush Frà Giovanni. They grin between the bars of dungeons, my friend—at least, those who have heads left to grin with. Be warned of me, and make an ally of the man who has made an ally of Venice. The Captain knows well what he is doing. If he has gone to the priest's house now, it is that the priest may win rewards for us again, as he has won them already a hundred times.

He spoke earnestly, though, in truth, his guess was not a good one. The Captain of the Police had not gone to the Island of the Guidecca to ask a service of the friar; he had gone, as he thought, to save the friar's life. At the moment when his subordinates were wagging their heads together, he himself stood in the priest's house, before the very table at which Frà Giovanni sat busy with his papers and his books.

"I implore you to listen to me, Prince!" he had just exclaimed very earnestly, as he repeated the news for the second time, and stood clamorous for the answer to his question.

The friar, who was dressed in the simple habit of the Capuchins, and who wore his cowl over his head so that only his shining black eyes could be seen, put down his pen when he heard himself addressed as "Prince."

"Captain," he said sharply, "who is this person you come here to warn? You speak of him as 'Prince.' It is some other, then, and not myself?"

The Captain bit his lip. He was one of the four in Venice who knew something of Frà Giovanni's past.

"Your Excellency's pardon," he exclaimed very humbly; "were we not alone, you would find me more discreet. I know well that the Prince of Iseo is dead—in Venice at least. But to Frà Giovanni, his near kinsman, I say beware, for there are those here who have sworn he shall not live to say Mass again."

For an instant a strange light came into the priest's eyes. But he gave no other sign either of surprise or of alarm.

"They have sworn it—you know their names, Captain?"

"The police do not concern themselves with names, Excellency."

"Which means that you do not know their names, Captain?"

Pietro Falier sighed. This friar never failed to humble him, he thought. If it were not for the honors which the monk had obtained for the police since he began his work in Venice, the Captain said that he would not lift a hand to save him from the meanest bravo in Italy.

"You do not know their names, Captain—confess, confess," continued the priest, raising his hand in a bantering gesture; "you come to me with some gossip of the bedchamber, your ears have been open in the market-place, and this tittle-tattle is your purchase—confess, confess.

The Captain flushed as he would have done before no other in all Venice.

"I do not know their names, Excellency," he stammered; "it is gossip from the *bravo's* kitchen. They say that you are to die before Mass to-morrow. I implore you not to leave this house to-night. We shall know how to do the rest if you will but remain indoors."

It was an earnest entreaty, but it fell upon deaf ears. The priest answered by taking a sheet of paper and beginning to write upon it.

"I am indebted to you, Signor Falier," said he, quietly, "and you know that I am not the man to forget my obligations. None the less, I fear that I must disregard your warning, for I have an appointment in the market to-night, and my word is not so easily broken. Let me reassure you a little. The news that you bring to me, and for which I am your debtor, was known to me three days ago. Here upon this paper I have written down the name of the woman and of her confederates who have hired the *bravo* Rocca to kill me to-night in the shadow of the church of San Salvatore. You will read that paper and the woman's name—when you have my permission."

Falier stepped back dumb with amazement.

"The woman's name, Excellency," he repeated, so soon as his surprise permitted him to speak, "you know her, then?"

"Certainly, or how could I write it upon the paper?"

"But you will give that paper to me, here and now. Think, Excellency, if she is your enemy, she is the enemy also of Venice. What forbids that we arrest her at once? You may not be alive at dawn!"

"In which case," exclaimed the priest, satirically, "the Signori of the Night would be well able to answer for the safety of the city. Is it not so, Captain?"

Falier stammered an excuse.

"We have not your eyes, Excellency; we cannot work miracles—but at least we can try to protect you from the hand of the assassin. Name this woman to me, and she shall not live when midnight strikes."

Frà Giovanni rose from his chair and put his hand gently upon the other's shoulder.

"Signor Falier," said he, "if I told you this woman's name here and now as you ask, the feast of Corpus Christi might find a new Doge in Venice."

"You say, Excellency—?"

"That the city is in danger as never she was before in her history."

"And your own life?"

"Shall be given for Venice if necessary. Listen to this: you seek to be of service to me. Have you any plan?"

"No plan but that which posts guards at your door and keeps you within these walls—"

"That the enemies of Venice may do their work. Is that your reason, Signor Falier?"

"I have no other reason, Excellency, but your own safety and that of the city."

"I am sure of it, Captain, and being sure I am putting my life in your hands to-night—"

"To-night; we are to follow you to the Merceria, then?"

"Not at all; say rather that you are to return to the palace and to keep these things so secret that even the Council has no word of them. But, at ten o'clock, take twenty of your best men and let your boat lie in the shadow of the church of San Luca until I have need of you. You understand, Captain Falier?"

Falier nodded his head and replied vaguely. Truth to tell, he understood very little beyond this—that the friar had been before him once more, and that he could but follow as a child trustingly. And the city was in danger! His heart beat quick when he heard the words.

"Excellency," he stammered, "the boat shall be there—at ten o'clock—in the shadow of the church of San Luca. But first—"

"No," said the priest, quickly, "we have done with our firstly—and your gondola waits, I think, signorè!"

CHAPTER II

The bells of the Chapel of St. Mark were striking the hour of eight o'clock when Frà Giovanni stepped from his gondola, and crossed the great square toward that labyrinth of narrow streets and winding alleys they call the Merceria.

The Piazza itself was then ablaze with the light of countless lamps; dainty lanterns, colored as the rainbow, swayed to the soft breeze between the arches of the colonnade. Nobles were seated at the doors of the splendid cafés; the music of stringed instruments mingled with the louder, sweeter music of the bells; women, whose jewels were as sprays of flame, many-hued and dazzling, hung timidly upon the arms of lovers; gallants swaggered in costly velvets and silks which were the spoil of the generous East; even cassocked priests and monks in their sombre habits passed to and fro amidst that glittering throng, come out to herald the glory of a summer's night.

And clear and round, lifting themselves up through the blue haze to the silent world of stars above, were the domes and cupolas of the great chapel itself—the chapel which, through seven centuries, had been the city's witness to the God who had made her great, and who would uphold her still before the nations.

The priest passed through the crowd swiftly, seeming to look neither to the right nor to the left. The brown habit of the Capuchins was his dress, and his cowl was drawn so well over his head that only his eyes were visible—those eyes which stand out so strangely in the many portraits which are still the proud possession of Venice. Though he knew well that an assassin waited for him in the purlieus of the church of San Salvatore, his step was quick and brisk; he walked as a man who goes willingly to a rendezvous, and anticipates its climax with pleasure. When he had left the great square with its blaze of lanterns and its babel of tongues, and had begun to thread the narrow streets by which he would reach the bridge of the Rialto, a smile played for a moment about his determined mouth, and he drew his capuce still closer over his ears.

"So it is Rocca whom they send—Rocca, the poltroon! Surely there is the hand of God in this."

He raised his eyes for a moment to the starlit heaven, and then continued his brisk walk. His way lay through winding alleys; over bridges so narrow that two men could not pass abreast; through passages where rogues lurked, and repulsive faces were thrust grinning into his own. But he knew the city as one who had lived there all his life; and for the others, the thieves and scum of Venice, he had no thought. Not until he came out before the church of Santa Maria Formosa did he once halt or look behind him. The mystery of the night was a joy to him. Even in the shadow of the church, his rest was but for a moment; and, as he rested, the meaning smile hovered again upon his wan face.

"The play begins," he muttered, while he loosened slightly the girdle of his habit and thrust his right hand inside it; "the God of Venice give me courage."

A man was following him now—he was sure of it. He had seen him as he turned to cross the bridge which would set him on the way to the church of San Salvatore—a short, squat man, masked and dressed from head to foot in black. Quick as the movements of the fellow were, dexterous his dives into porches and the patches of shadow which the eaves cast, the priest's trained eye followed his every turn, numbered, as it were, the very steps he took. And the smile upon Frà Giovanni's face was fitful no more. He walked as a man who has a great jest for his company.

"Rocca the fool, and alone! They pay me a poor compliment, those new friends of mine; but we shall repay, and the debt will be heavy."

He withdrew his hand from his habit, where it had rested upon the hilt of a dagger, for he knew that he had no need of any weapon. His gait was quick and careless; he stopped often to peer into some windowless shop where a sickly lamp burned before the picture of a saint; and wares, which had not tempted a dead generation, appealed unavailingly to a living one. The idea that his very merriment might cost him his life never entered his head. He played with the assassin as a cat with a mouse, now tempting him to approach, now turning suddenly, and sending him helter-skelter into the door of a shop or the shadow of a bridge. He was sure of his man, and that certainty was a delight to him.

"If it had been any other but Rocca the clown!" he said to himself, his thoughts ever upon the jest; "surely we shall know what to say to him."

He had come almost to the church of San Salvatore by this time. His walk had carried him out to the bank of a narrow, winding canal, at whose quays once-splendid gondolas were rotting in neglect. It seemed to him that here was the place where his tactics might well be changed and the *rôle* of the hunted put aside for that of the hunter. Quick to act, he stepped suddenly behind one of the great wooden piles driven into the quay for the warping of barges. The *bravo,* who did not perceive that he had been detected, and who could not account for the sudden disappearance of his prey, came straight on, his cloak wrapped about his face, his naked sword in his hand. The wage would be earned easily that night, he was telling himself. No one would miss a beggarly monk—and he, Rocca, must live. A single blow, struck to the right side of the back, and then—and then—

This pleasant anticipation was cut short abruptly by the total disappearance of the man whose death was a preliminary to the wage he anticipated so greedily. Mystified beyond measure, he let his cloak fall back again, and began to peer into the shadows as though some miracle had been wrought and the priest carried suddenly from earth to that heaven whither he had meant to send him so unceremoniously.

"Blood of Paul!" he exclaimed angrily, turning about and about again, "am I losing my eyes? A plague upon the place and the shadows."

He stamped his foot impotently, and was about to run back by the way he had come when a voice spoke in the shadows; and at the sound of the voice, the sword fell from the man's hand and he reeled back as from a blow.

"Rocca Zicani, the Prince is waiting for you."

The assassin staggered against the door of a house, and stood there as one paralyzed. He had heard those words once before in the dungeons of Naples. They had been spoken by the Inquisitors who came to Italy with one of the Spanish princes. Instantly he recalled the scene where first he had listened to them—the dungeon draped in black—the white-hot irons which had seared his flesh; the rack which had maimed his limbs, the masked men who had tortured him.

"Great God!" he moaned, "not that—not that—"

The priest stepped from the shadows and stood in a place where the feeble light of an oil lamp could fall upon his face. The laugh hovered still about his lips. He regarded the trembling man with a contempt he would not conceal.

"Upon my word, Signor Rocca," he exclaimed, "this is a poor welcome to an old friend."

The *bravo,* who had fallen on his knees, for he believed that a trick had again delivered him into the hands of his enemies, looked up at the words, and stared at the monk as at an apparition.

"Holy Virgin!" he cried, "it is the Prince of Iseo."

The priest continued in the jester's tone:

"As you say, old comrade, the Prince of Iseo. Glory to God for the good fortune which puts you in my path to-night! Oh, you are very glad to see me, Signor Rocca, I'll swear to that. What, the fellow whom my hands snatched from the rack in the house of the Duke of Naples—has he no word for me? And he carries his naked sword in his hand; he has the face of a woman and his knees tremble. What means this?"

He had seemed to speak in jest, but while the cowed man was still kneeling before him, he, of a sudden, struck the sword aside, and, stooping, he gripped the *bravo* by the throat and dragged him from the shelter of the porch to the water's edge. As iron were the relentless hands; the man's eyes started from his head, the very breath seemed to be crushed out of him in the grip of the terrible priest.

"Signor Rocca, what means this?" the friar repeated. "A naked sword in your hand and sweat upon your brow. Oh, oh! a tale, indeed! Shall I read it to you, or shall I raise my voice and fetch those who will read it for me—those who have the irons heated, and the boot so made for your leg that no last in Italy shall better it. Speak, rascal, shall I read you the tale?"

"Mercy, Prince, for the love of God!"

The priest released the pressure of his hands and let the other sink at his feet.

"Who sent you, rogue?" he asked. "Who pays your wage?"

"I dare not tell you, Excellency."

"Dare not! *you* dare not—you, whom a word will put to torture greater than any you have dreamed of in your worst agonies; *you* dare not."

"Excellency, the Countess of Treviso; I am her servant."

"And the man who sent her to the work—his name?"

"Andrea, Count of Pisa, Excellency."

The priest stepped back as one whose curiosity was entirely satisfied.

"Ah! I thought so. And the price they paid you, knave?"

"Forty silver ducats, Excellency."

"Ho, ho! so that is the price of a friar in Venice."

The *bravo* sought to join in the jest.

"Had they known it was the Prince of Iseo, it had been a hundred thousand, Excellency."

Frà Giovanni did not listen to him. His quick brain was solving a strange problem—the problem of the price that these people, in their turn, should pay to Venice. When he had solved it, he turned to the cringing figure at his feet.

"Signor Rocca," he said, "do you know of what I am thinking?"

"Of mercy, Excellency; of mercy for one who has not deserved it."

"But who can deserve it?"

"Excellency, hearken to me. I swear by all the saints—"

"In whose name you blaspheme, rascal. Have I not heard your oath in Naples when the irons seared your flesh? Shall I listen again when the fire is being made ready, and there is burning coal beneath the bed you will lie upon to-night, Signor Rocca?"

"Oh! for God's sake, Excellency!"

"Not so; for the sake of Venice, rather."

"I will be your slave—I swear it on the cross—I will give my life—"

"Your precious life, Signor Rocca!—nay, what a profligate you are!"

Frà Giovanni's tone, perhaps, betrayed him. The trembling man began to take heart a little.

"Prove me Excellency," he whined; "prove me here and now."

The friar made a pretence of debating it. After a little spell of silence he bade the other rise.

"Come," he said, "your legs catch cold, my friend, and will burn slowly. Stretch them here upon the Campo while I ask you some questions. And remember, for every lie you tell me there shall be another wedge in the boot you are about to wear. You understand that, signorè?"

"Excellency, the man that could lie to the Prince of Iseo has yet to be born."

It was a compliment spoken from the very heart; but the priest ignored it.

"Let us not speak of others, but of you and your friends. And, firstly, of the woman who sent you. She is now—"

"In the Palazzo Pisani waiting news of you."

"You were to carry that news to her?"

"And to receive my wage, Excellency. But I did not know what work it was—Holy God, I would not have come for—"

Frà Giovanni cut him short with a gesture of impatience.

"Tell me," he exclaimed, "the Count of Pisa, is he not the woman's lover?"

"They say so, signorè."

"And he is at her house to-night?"

The man shook his head.

"Before Heaven, I do not know, Excellency. An hour ago, he sat at a café in the great square."

"And the woman—was she alone when you left her?"

"There were three with her to sup."

The priest nodded his head.

"It is good!" he said; "we shall even presume to sup with her."

"To sup with her—but they will kill you, Excellency!"

"Ho, ho! see how this assassin is concerned for my life.

"Certainly I am. Have you not given me mine twice? I implore you not to go to the house—"

He would have said more, but the splash of an oar in the narrow canal by which they walked cut short his entreaties. A gondola was approaching them; the cry of the gondolier, awakening echoes beneath the eaves of the old houses, gave to Frà Giovanni that inspiration he had been seeking now for some minutes.

"Rocca Zicani," he exclaimed, standing suddenly as the warning cry, *"Stalè,"* became more distinct, "I am going to put your professions to the proof."

"Excellency, I will do anything—"

"Then, if you would wake to-morrow with a head upon your shoulders, enter that gondola, and go back to those who sent you. Demand your wage of them—"

'But, Excellency—"

"Demand your wage of them," persisted the priest, sternly, "and say that the man who was their enemy lies dead before the church of San Salvatore. You understand me?"

A curious look came into the *bravo's* eyes.

"Saint John!" he cried, "that I should have followed such a one as you, Excellency!"

But the priest continued warningly:

"As you obey, so hope for the mercy of Venice. You deal with those who know how to reward their friends and to punish their enemies. Betray us, and I swear that no death in all Italy shall be such a death as you will die at dawn to-morrow."

He raised his voice, and summoned the gondolier to the steps of the quay. The *bravo* threw himself down upon the velvet cushions with the threat still ringing in his ears.

"Excellency," he said, "I understand. They shall hear that you are dead."

THE RISEN DEAD

CHAPTER III

Frà Giovanni stepped from his gondola, and stood at the door of the Palazzo Pisani exactly at a quarter to ten o'clock. Thirty minutes had passed since he had talked with the *bravo,* Rocca, and had put him to the proof. The time was enough, he said; the tale would have been told, the glad news of his own death already enjoyed by those who would have killed him.

Other men, perhaps, standing there upon the threshold of so daring an emprise, would have known some temptation of fear or hesitation in such a fateful moment; but the great Capuchin friar neither paused nor hesitated. That strange confidence in his own mission, his belief that God had called him to the protection of Venice, perchance even a personal conceit in his own skill as a swordsman, sent him hurrying to the work. It was a draught of life to him to see men tremble at his word; the knowledge which treachery poured into his ear was a study finer than that of all the manuscripts in all the libraries of Italy. And he knew that he was going to the Palazzo Pisani to humble one of the greatest in the city—to bring the sons of Princes on their knees before him.

There were many lights in the upper stories of the great house, but the ground floor, with its barred windows and cell-like chambers, was unlighted. The priest saw horrid faces grinning through the bars; the faces of fugitives, fleeing the justice of Venice, outcasts of the city, murderers. But these outcasts, in their turn, were silent when they saw who came to the house, and they spoke of the strange guest in muted exclamations of surprise and wonder.

"Blood of Paul! do you see that? It is the Capuchin himself and alone. Surely there will be work to do anon."

"Ay, but does he come alone? Saint John! I would sooner slit a hundred throats than have his shadow fall on me. Was it not he that hanged Orso and the twelve! A curse upon the day he came to Venice."

So they talked in whispers, but the priest had passed already into the great hall of the palace and was speaking to a lackey there.

"My friend," he said, "I come in the name of the Signori.

If you would not hear from them to-morrow, announce me to none."

The lackey drew back, quailing before the threat.

"Excellency," he exclaimed, "I am but a servant—"

"And shall find a better place as you serve Venice faithfully."

He passed on with noiseless steps, mounting the splendid marble staircase upon which the masterpieces of Titian and of Paolo Veronese looked down. At the head of the stairs, there was a painted door, which he had but to open to find himself face to face with those who were still telling each other that he was dead.

For an instant, perhaps, a sense of the danger of his mission possessed him. He knew well that one false step, one word undeliberated, would be paid for with his own blood. But even in the face of this reckoning he did not hesitate. He was there to save Venice from her enemies; the God of Venice would protect him. And so without word or warning, he opened the door and stood, bold and unflinching, before those he had come to accuse.

There were four at table, and one was a woman. The priest knew her well. She had been called the most beautiful woman in Venice—Catherine, Countess of Treviso. Still young, with a face which spoke of ambition and of love, her white neck glittered with the jewels it carried, her dress of blue velvet was such a dress as only a noblewoman of Venice could wear. A queenly figure, the friar said, yet one he would so humble presently that never should she hold up her head again.

As for the others, the men who had cloaked conspiracy with a woman's smile, he would know how to deal with them. Indeed, when he scanned their faces and began to remember the circumstances under which he had met them before, his courage was strengthened, and he forgot that he had ever reasoned with it.

He stood in the shadows; but the four, close in talk, and thinking that a lackey had entered the room, did not observe him. They were laughing merrily at some jest, and filling the long goblets with the golden wine of Cyprus, when at last he strode out into the light and spoke to them. His heart beat quickly; he knew that this might be the hour of his death, yet never had his voice been more sonorous or more sure.

"Countess," he exclaimed, as he stepped boldly to the table and confronted them, "I bring you a message from Andrea, the lord of Pisa!"

He had expected that the woman would cry out, or that the men would leap to their feet and draw their swords; but the supreme moment passed and no one spoke. A curious silence reigned in the place. From without there floated up the gay notes of a gondolier's carol. The splash of oars was heard, and the low murmur of voices. But within the room you could have counted the tick of a watch—almost the beating of a man's heart. And the woman was the first to find her tongue. She had looked at the friar as she would have looked at the risen dead; but, suddenly, with an effort which brought back the blood to her cheeks, she rose from her seat and began to speak.

"Who are you?" she asked; "and why do you come to this house?"

Frà Giovanni advanced to the table so that they could see his face.

"Signora," he said, "the reason of my coming to this house I have already told you. As to your other question, I am the Capuchin friar, Giovanni, whom you desired your servant Rocca to kill at the church of San Salvatore an hour ago."

The woman sank back into the chair; the blood left her face; she would have swooned had not curiosity proved stronger than her terror.

"The judgment of God!" she cried.

Again, for a spell, there was silence in the room. The priest stood at the end of the table telling himself that he must hold these four in talk until the bells of San Luca struck ten o'clock, or pay for failure with his life. The men, in their turn, were asking themselves if he were alone.

"You are the Capuchin friar, Giovanni," exclaimed one of them presently, taking courage of the silence, "what, then, is your message from the Count of Pisa?"

"My message, signorè, is this—that at ten o'clock to-night, the Count of Pisa will have ceased to live."

A strange cry, terrible in its pathos, escaped the woman's lips. All had risen to their feet again. The swords of the three leaped from their scabbards. The instant of the priest's death seemed at hand. But he stood, resolute, before them.

"At ten o'clock," he repeated sternly, "the Count of Pisa will have ceased to live. That is his message, signori, to one in this house. And to you, the Marquis of Cittadella, there is another message."

He turned to one of the three who had begun to rail at him, and raised his hand as in warning. So great was the curiosity to hear his words that the swords were lowered again, and again there could be heard the ticking of a clock in the great room.

"For me—a message! Surely I am favored, signorè."

"Of that you shall be the judge, since, at dawn to-morrow, your head will lie on the marble slab between the columns of the Piazzetta."

They greeted him with shouts of ridicule.

"A prophet—a prophet!"

"A prophet indeed," he answered quietly, "who has yet a word to speak to you, Andrea Foscari."

"To me!" exclaimed the man addressed, who was older than the others, and who wore the stola of the nobility.

"Ay, to you, who are about to become a fugitive from the justice of Venice. Midnight shall see you hunted in the hills, my lord; no house shall dare to shelter you; no hand shall give you bread. When you return to the city you would have betrayed, the very children shall mock you for a beggar."

Foscari answered with an oath, and drew back. The third of the men, a youth who wore a suit of white velvet, and whose vest was ablaze with gold and jewels, now advanced jestingly.

"And for me, most excellent friar?"

"For you, Gian Mocenigo, a pardon in the name of that Prince of Venice whose house you have dishonored."

Again they replied to him with angry gibes.

"A proof—a proof—we will put you to the proof, friar—here and now, or, by God, a prophet shall pay with his life."

He saw that they were driven to the last point. While the woman stood as a figure of stone at the table, the three advanced toward him and drove him back before their threatening swords. The new silence was the silence of his death anticipated. He thought that his last word was spoken in vain. Ten o'clock would never strike, he said. Yet even as hope seemed to fail him, and he told himself that the end had come, the bells of the city began to strike the hour, and the glorious music of their echoes floated over the sleeping waters.

"A proof, you ask me for a proof, signori," he exclaimed triumphantly. "Surely, the proof lies in yonder room, where all the world may see it."

He pointed to a door opening in the wall of mirrors, and giving access to a smaller chamber. Curiosity drove the men thither. They threw open the door; they entered the room; they reeled back drunk with their own terror.

For the body of Andrea, lord of Pisa, lay, still warm, upon the marble pavement of the chamber, and the dagger with which he had been stabbed was yet in his heart.

"A proof—have I not given you a proof?" the priest cried again, while the woman's terrible cry rang through the house, and the three stood close together, as men upon whom a judgment has fallen.

"Man or devil—who are you?" they asked in hushed whispers.

He answered them by letting his monk's robe slip from his shoulders. As the robe fell, they beheld a figure clad in crimson velvet and corselet of burnished gold; the figure of a man whose superb limbs had been the envy of the swordsmen of Italy; whose face, lighted now with a sense of power and of victory, was a face for which women had given their lives.

"It is the Prince of Iseo," they cried, and, saying it, fled from the house of doom.

At that hour, those whose gondolas were passing the Palazzo Pisani observed a strange spectacle. A priest stood upon the balcony of the house holding a silver lamp in his hand; and as he waited, a boat emerged from the shadows about the church of San Luca and came swiftly toward him.

"The Signori of the Night," the loiterers exclaimed in hushed whispers, and went on their way quickly.

. . . .

Very early next morning, a rumor of strange events, which had happened in Venice during the hours of darkness, drew a great throng of the people to the square before the ducal palace.

"Have you not heard it," man cried to man—"the Palazzo Pisani lacks a mistress to-day? The police make their toilet in the boudoir of my lady. And they say that the lord of Pisa is dead."

"Worse than that, my friends," a gondolier protested, "Andrea Foscari crossed to Maestre last night, and the dogs are even now on his heels."

"Your news grows stale," croaked a hag who was passing; "go to the Piazzetta and you shall see the head of one who prayed before the altar ten minutes ago."

They trooped off, eager for the spectacle. When they reached the Piazzetta, the hag was justified. The head of a man lay bleeding upon the marble slab between the columns. It was the head of the Marquis of Cittadella.

In the palace of the police, meanwhile, Pietro Falier, the Captain, was busy with his complaints.

"The lord of Pisa is dead," he said, "the woman has gone to the Convent of Murano; there is a head between the columns; Andrea Foscari will die of hunger in the hills—yet Gian Mocenigo goes free. Who is this friar that he shall have the gift of life or death in Venice?"

His subordinate answered—

"This friar, Captain, is one whom Venice, surely, will make the greatest of her nobles to-day."

Cowardice Court

BY GEO. B. McCUTCHEON

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CHAPTER I

IN WHICH A YOUNG MAN TRESPASSES

"HE'S just an infernal dude, your lordship, and I'll throw him in the river if he says a word too much."

"He has already said too much, Tompkins, confound him, don't you know."

"Then I'm to throw him in whether he says anything or not, sir?"

"Have you seen him?"

"No, your lordship, but James has. James says he wears a red coat and—"

"Never mind, Tompkins. He had no right to fish on this side of that log. The insufferable ass may own the land on the opposite side, but confound his impertinence, I own it on this side."

This concluding assertion of the usually placid but now irate Lord Bazelhurst was not quite as momentous as it sounded. As a matter of fact, the title to the land was vested entirely in his young American wife; his sole possession, according to report, being a title much less substantial but a great deal more picturesque than the large, much-handled piece of paper down in the safety deposit vault—lying close and crumpled among a million sordid, homely little slips called coupons.

It requires no great stretch of imagination to understand that Lord Bazelhurst had an undesirable neighbor. That neighbor was young Mr. Shaw—Randolph Shaw, heir to the Randolph fortune. It may be fair to state that Mr. Shaw also considered himself to be possessed of an odious neighbor. In other words, although neither had seen the other, there was a feud between the owners of the two estates that had all the earmarks of an ancient romance.

Lady Bazelhurst was the daughter of a New York millionaire; she was young, beautiful, and arrogant. Nature gave her youth and beauty; marriage gave her the remaining quality. Was she not Lady Bazelhurst? What odds if Lord Bazelhurst happened to be a middle-aged, addle-pated ass? So much the better. Bazelhurst castle and the Bazelhurst estates (heavily encumbered before her father came to the rescue) were among the oldest and most coveted in the English market. Her mother noted, with unctuous joy, that the present Lady Bazelhurst in babyhood had extreme difficulty in mastering the eighth letter of the alphabet, certainly a most flattering sign of natal superiority, notwithstanding the fact that her father was plain old John Banks (deceased), formerly of Jersey City, more latterly of Wall street and St. Thomas's.

Bazelhurst was a great catch, but Banks was a good name to conjure with, so he capitulated with a willingness that savored somewhat of suspended animation (so fearful was he that he might do something to disturb the dream before it came true). That was two years ago. With exquisite irony, Lady Bazelhurst decided to have a country-place in America. Her agents discovered a glorious section of woodland in the Adirondacks, teeming with trout streams, game haunts, unparalleled scenery; her ladyship instructed them to buy without delay. It was just here that young Mr. Shaw came into prominence.

His grandfather had left him a fortune and he was looking about for ways in which to spend a portion of it. College, travel, and society having palled on him, he hied himself into the big hills west of Lake Champlain, searching for beauty, solitude, and life as he imagined it should be lived. He found and bought five hundred acres of the most beautiful bit of wilderness in the mountains.

The same streams coursed through his hills and dales that ran through those of Lady Bazelhurst, the only distinction being that his portion was the more desirable. When her ladyship's agents came leisurely up to close their deal, they discovered that Mr. Shaw had snatched up this choice five hundred acres of the original tract intended for their client. At least one thousand acres were left for the young lady, but she was petulant enough to covet all of it.

Overtures were made to Mr. Shaw, but he would not sell. He was preparing to erect a handsome country-place, and he did not want to alter his plans. Courteously at first, then somewhat scathingly he declined to discuss the proposition with her agents. After two months of pressure of the most tiresome persistency, he lost his temper and sent a message to his inquisitors that suddenly terminated all negotiations. Afterward, when he learned that heir client was a lady, he wrote a conditional note of apology, but, if he expected a response, he was disappointed. A year went by, and now, with the beginning of this narrative, two newly completed country homes glowered at each other from separate hillsides, one envious and spiteful, the other defiant and a bit satirical.

Bazelhurst Villa looks across the valley and sees Shaw's Cottage commanding the most beautiful view in the hills; the very eaves of her ladyship's house seem to have wrinkled into a constant scowl of annoyance. Shaw's long, low cottage seems to smile back with tantalizing security, serene in its more lofty altitude, in its more gorgeous raiment of nature. The brooks laugh with the glitter of trout, the trees chuckle with the flight of birds, the hillsides frolic in their abundance of game, but the acres are growling like dogs of war. "Love thy neighbor as thyself" is not printed on the boards that line the borders of the two estates. In bold black letters the sign-boards laconically say: "No trespassing on these grounds. Keep off!"

"Yes, I fancy you'd better put him off the place if he comes down here again to fish, Tompkins," said his lordship, in conclusion. Then he touched whip to his horse and bobbed off through the shady lane in a most painfully upright fashion, his thin legs sticking straight out, his breath coming in agonized little jerks with each succeeding return of his person to the saddle.

"By Jove, Evelyn, it's most annoying about that confounded Shaw chap," he remarked to his wife as he mounted the broad steps leading to the gallery half an hour later, walking with the primness which suggests pain. Lady Bazelhurst looked up from her book, her fine aristocratic young face clouding with ready belligerence.

"What has he done, Cecil dear?"

"Been fishing on our property again, that's all. Tompkins says he laughed at him when he told him to get off. I say, do you know, I think I'll have to adopt rough methods with that chap. Hang it all, what right has he to catch our fish?"

"Oh, how I hate that man!" exclaimed her ladyship petulantly.

"But I've given Tompkins final instructions."

"And what are they?"

"To throw him in the river next time."

"Oh, if he only *could!"* rapturously.

"Could? My dear, Tompkins is an American. He can handle these chaps in their own way. At any rate, I told Tompkins if his nerve failed him at the last minute to come and notify me. *I'll* attend to this confounded popinjay!"

"Good for you, Cecil!" called out another young woman from the broad hammock in which she had been dawdling with half-alert ears through the foregoing conversation. "Spoken like a true Briton. What is this popinjay like?"

"Hullo, sister. Hang it all, what's he like? He's like an ass, that's all. I've never seen him, but if I'm ever called upon to—but you don't care to listen to details. You remember the big log that lies out in the river up at the bend? Well, it marks the property line. One half of its stump belongs to the Shaw man, the other half to m— to us, Evelyn. He shan't fish below that log—no, sir!" His lordship glared fiercely through his monocle in the direction of the far-away log, his watery blue eyes blinking as malevolently as possible, his long, aristocratic nose wrinkling at its base in fine disdain. His five feet four of stature quivered with illy-subdued emotion, but whether it was rage or the sudden recollection of the dog-trot through the woods, it is beyond me to suggest.

"But suppose our fish venture into his waters, Cecil; what then? Isn't that trespass?" demanded the Honorable Penelope Drake, youngest and most cherished sister of his lordship.

"Now, don't be silly, Pen," cried her sister-in-law. "Of course we can't regulate the fish."

"But I daresay his fish will come below the log, so what's the odds?" said his lordship quickly. "A trout's a lawless brute at best."

"Is he big?" asked the Honorable Penelope lazily.

"They vary, my dear girl."

"I mean Mr. Shaw."

"Oh, I thought you meant the—but I don't know. What difference does that make? Big or little, he has to stay off my grounds." Was it a look of pride that his tall young wife bestowed upon him as he drew himself proudly erect or was it akin to pity? At any rate, her gay young American head was inches above his own when she arose and suggested that they go inside and prepare for the housing of the guests who were to come over from the evening train.

"The drag has gone over to the station, Cecil, and it should be here by seven o'clock."

"Confound his impudence, I'll show him," grumbled his lordship as he followed her, stiff-legged, toward the door.

"What's up, Cecil, with your legs?" called his sister. "Are you getting old?" This suggestion always irritated him.

"Old? Silly question. You know how old I am. No; it's that beastly American horse. Evelyn, I told you they have no decent horses in this beastly country. They jiggle the life out of one—" but he was obliged to unbend himself perceptibly in order to keep pace with her as she hurried through the door.

The Honorable Penelope allowed her indolent gaze to follow them. A perplexed pucker finally developed on her fair brow and her thought was almost expressed aloud: "By Jove, I wonder if she really loves him." Penelope was very pretty and very bright. She was visiting America for the first time and she was learning rapidly. "Cecil's a good sort, you know, even—" but she was loyal enough to send her thoughts into other channels.

Nightfall brought half a dozen guests to Bazelhurst Villa. They were fashionable to the point where ennui is the chief characteristic, and they came only for bridge and sleep. There was a duke among them and also a French count, besides the bored New Yorkers; they wanted brandy and soda as soon as they got into the house, and they went to bed early because it was so much easier to sleep lying down than sitting up.

All were up by noon next day, more bored than ever, fondly praying that nothing might happen before bedtime. The duke was making desultory love to Mrs. De Peyton and Mrs. De Peyton was leading him aimlessly toward the shadier and more secluded nooks in the park surrounding the Villa. Penelope, fresh and full of the purpose of life, was off alone for a long stroll. By this means she avoided the attentions of the duke, who wanted to marry her; those of the count who also said he wanted to marry her but couldn't because his wife would not consent; those of one New Yorker, who liked her because she was English; and the pallid chatter of the women who bored her with their conjugal cynicisms.

"What the deuce is this coming down the road?" queried the duke, returning from the secluded nook at luncheon time.

"Some one has been hurt," exclaimed his companion. Others were looking down the leafy road from the gallery.

"By Jove, it's Penelope, don't you know," ejaculated the duke, dropping his monocle and blinking his eye as if to rest it for the time being.

"But she's not hurt. She's helping to support one of those men."

"Hey!" shouted his lordship from the gallery, as Penelope and two dilapidated male companions abruptly started to cut across the park in the direction of the stables. "What's up?" Penelope waved her hand aimlessly, but did not change her course. Whereupon the entire house party sallied forth in more or less trepidation to intercept the strange party.

"Who are these men?" demanded Lady Bazelhurst, as they came up to the fast-breathing young Englishwoman.

"Don't bother me, please. We must get him to bed at once. He'll have pneumonia," replied Penelope.

Both men were dripping wet and the one in the middle limped painfully, probably because both eyes were swollen tight and his nose was bleeding. Penelope's face was beaming with excitement and interest.

"Who are you?" demanded his lordship planting himself in front of the shivering twain.

"Tompkins," murmured the blind one feebly, tears starting from the blue slits and rolling down his cheeks.

"James, sir," answered the other, touching his damp forelock.

"Are they drunk?" asked Mrs. De Peyton, with fresh enthusiasm.

"No, they are not, poor fellows," cried Penelope. "They have taken nothing but water."

"By Jove, deuced clever that," drawled the duke. "Eh?" to the New Yorker.

"Deuced," from the Knickerbocker.

"Well, well, what's it all about?" demanded Bazelhurst.

"Mr. Shaw, sir," said James.

"Good Lord, couldn't you rescue him?" in horror.

"He rescued us, sir," mumbled Tompkins.

"You mean—"

"He throwed us in and then had to jump in and pull us out, sir. Beggin' your pardon, sir, but *damn* him!"

"And you didn't throw him in, after all? By Jove, extraordinary!"

"Do you mean to tell us that he threw you great hulking creatures into the river? Single-handed?" cried Lady Bazelhurst, aghast.

"He did, Evelyn," inserted Penelope. "I met them coming home, and poor Tompkins was out of his senses. I don't know how it happened, but—"

"It was this way, your ladyship," put in James, the groom. "Tompkins and me could see him from the point there, sir, afishin' below the log. So we says to each other 'Come on,' and up we went to where he was afishin'. Tompkins, bein' the game warden, says he to him 'Hi there!' He was plainly on our property, sir, afishin' from a boat for bass, sir. 'Hello, boys,' says he back to us. 'Get off our land,' says Tompkins. 'I am,' says he; 'it's water out here where I am.' Then—"

"You're wrong," broke in Tompkins. "He said 'it's wet out here where I am.'"

"You're right. It was wet. Then Tompkins called him a vile name, your lordship—shall I repeat it, sir?"

"No, no!" cried four feminine voices.

"Yes, do," muttered the duke.

"He didn't wait after that, sir. He rowed to shore in a flash and landed on our land. 'What do you mean by that?' he said, mad-like. 'My orders is to put you off this property,' says Tompkins, 'or to throw you in the river.' 'Who gave these orders?' asked Mr. Shaw. 'Lord Bazelhurst, sir, damn you—' beg pardon, sir; it slipped out. 'And who the devil is Lord Bazelthurst?' said he. 'Hurst,' said Tompkins. 'He owns this ground. Can't you see the mottoes on the trees—No Trespassin'?'—but Mr. Shaw said: 'Well, why don't you throw me in the river?' He kinder smiled when he said it. 'I will,' says Tompkins, and made a rush for him. I don't just remember why I started in to help Tompkins, but I did. Somehow, sir, Mr. Shaw got—"

"Don't call him *Mr.* Shaw. Just Shaw; he's no gentleman," exploded Lord Bazelhurst.

"But he told us both to call him 'Mister,' sir, as long as we lived. I kinder got in the habit of it, your lordship, up there. That is, that's what he told us after he got through with us. Well, anyhow, he got the start of us an'—there's Tompkins' eyes, sir, and look at my ear. Then he pitched us both in the river."

"Good Lord!" gasped the duke.

"Diable!" sputtered the count.

"Splendid!" cried Penelope, her eyes sparkling.

"Hang it all, Pen, don't interrupt the count," snorted Bazelhurst, for want of something better to say and perhaps hoping that Deveaux might say in French what could not be uttered in English.

"Don't say it in French, count," said little Miss Folsom. "It deserves English."

"Go on, James," sternly, from Lady Bazelhurst.

"Well, neither of us can swim, your ladyship, an' we'd 'a' drowned if Mr.—if Shaw hadn't jumped in himself an' pulled us out. As it was, sir, Tompkins was unconscious. We rolled him on a log, sir, an' got a keg of water out of him. Then Mr.—er—Shaw told us to go 'ome and get in bed, sir."

"He sent a message to you, sir," added Tompkins, shivering mightily.

"Well, I'll have one for him, never fear," said his lordship, glancing about bravely. "I won't permit any man to assault my servants and brutally maltreat them. No, sir! He shall hear from me—or my attorney."

"He told us to tell you, sir, that if he ever caught anybody from this place on his land he'd serve him worse than he did us," said Tompkins.

"He says, 'I don't want no Bazelhursts on my place,'" added James in finality.

"Go to bed, both of you!" roared his lordship.

"Very good, sir," in unison.

"They can get to bed without your help, I daresay, Pen," added his lordship caustically, as she started away with them. Penelope with a rare blush and—well, one party went to luncheon while the other went to bed.

"I should like to see this terrible Mr. Shaw," observed Penelope at table. "He's a sort of Jack-the-Giant-Killer, I fancy."

"He is the sort one *has* to meet in America," lamented her ladyship.

"Oh, I say now," expostulated the New York young man, wryly.

"I don't mean in good society," she corrected, with unconscious irony.

"Oh," said he, very much relieved.

"He's a demmed cad," said his lordship conclusively.

"Because he chucked your men into the river?" asked Penelope sweetly.

'She's dooced pretty, eh?" whispered the duke to Mrs. De Peyton without taking his eyes from his young countrywoman's face.

"Who?" asked Mrs. De Peyton. Then he relinquished his gaze and turned his monocle blankly upon the American beside him.

"I shall send him a warning that he'll have to respect, cad or no cad," said Bazelhurst, absently spreading butter upon his fingers instead of the roll.

"*Send* him a warning?" asked his queenly wife. "Aren't you going to see him personally? You can't trust the servants, it seems."

"My dear, I can't afford to lose my temper and engage in a row with that bounder, and there's no end of trouble I might get into—"

"I shall see him myself, if you won't," said her ladyship firmly. There was frigid silence at the table for a full minute, relieved only when his lordship's monocle dropped into the glass of water he was trying to convey to his lips. He thought best to treat the subject lightly, so he laughed in his most jovial way.

"You'd better take a mackintosh with you, my dear," he said. "Remember what he told Tompkins and James."

"He will not throw *me* into the river. It might be different if you went. Therefore I think—"

"Throw me in, would he?" and Bazelhurst laughed loudly. "I'm no groom, my dear. You forget that it *is* possible for Mr. Shaw to be soused."

"He was good enough to souse himself this morning," volunteered Penelope. "I rather like him."

"By Jove, Cecil, you're not afraid to meet him, are you?" asked the duke with tantalizing coolness. "You know, if you are, I'll go over and talk to the fellow."

"Afraid? Now, hang it all, Barminster, that's rather a shabby thing to suggest. You forget India."

"I'm trying to. Demmed miserable time I had out there. But this fellow fights. That's more than the beastly natives did when we were out there. Marching isn't fighting, you know."

"Confound it, you forget the time—"

"Mon Dieu, are we to compare ze Hindoo harem wiz ze American feest slugger?" cried the count, with a wry face.

"What's that?" demanded two noblemen in one voice. The count apologized for his English.

"No one but a coward would permit this disagreeable Shaw creature to run affairs in such a high-handed way," said her ladyship. "Of course Cecil is not a coward."

"Thank you, my dear. Never fear, ladies and gentlemen; I shall attend to this person. He won't soon forget what I have to say to him," promised Lord Bazelhurst, mentally estimating the number of brandies and soda it would require in preparation.

"This afternoon?" asked his wife, with cruel insistence.

"Yes, Evelyn—if I can find him."

And so it was that shortly after four o'clock, Lord Bazelhurst, unattended at his own request, rode forth like a Lochinvar, his steed headed bravely toward Shaw's domain, his back facing his own home with a military indifference that won applause from the assembled house party.

"I'll face him alone," he had said, a trifle thickly, for some unknown reason, when the duke offered to accompany him. It also might have been noticed as he cantered down the drive that his legs did not stick out so stiffly, nor did his person bob so exactingly as on previous but peaceful expeditions.

In fact, he seemed a bit limp. But his face was set determinedly for the border line and Shaw.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH A YOUNG WOMAN TRESPASSES

Mr. Shaw was a tall young man of thirty or thereabouts, smooth-faced, good-looking and athletic. It was quite true that he wore a red coat when tramping through his woods and vales, not because it was fashionable, but because he had a vague horror of being shot at by some near-sighted nimrod from Manhattan. A crowd of old college friends had just left him alone in the hills after spending several weeks at his place, and his sole occupation these days, aside from directing the affairs about the house and grounds, lay in the efforts to commune with nature by means of a shotgun and a fishing-rod. His most constant companion was a pipe, his most loyal follower a dog.

As he sauntered slowly down the river road that afternoon, smiling retrospectively from time to time as he looked into the swift, narrow stream that had welcomed his adversaries of the morning, he little thought of the encounter in store for him. The little mountain stream was called a river by courtesy because it was yards wider than the brooks that struggled impotently to surpass it during the rainy season. But it was deep and turbulent in places and it had a roar at times that commanded the respect of the foolhardy.

"The poor devils might have drowned, eh, Bonaparte?" he mused, addressing the dog at his side. "Confounded nuisance, getting wet after all, though. Lord Bazelhurst wants war, does he? That log down there is the dividing line in our river, eh? And I have to stay on this side of it. By George, he's a mean-spirited person. And it's his wife's land, too. I wonder what she's like. It's a pity a fellow can't have a quiet, decent summer up here in the hills. Still" —lighting his pipe—"I daresay I can give as well as I take. If I stay off his land, they'll have to keep off of mine. Hullo, who's that? A man, by George, but he looks like a partridge. As I live, Bonaparte is pointing. Ha, ha, that's one on you, Bony." Mr. Shaw stepped into the brush at the side of the path and watched the movements of the man at the "log," now less than one hundred yards away.

Lord Bazelhurst, attired in his brown corduroys and his tan waistcoat, certainly suggested the partridge as he hopped nimbly about in the distant foreground, cocking his ears from time to time with all the aloofness of that wily bird. He was, strange to relate, some little distance from Bazelhurst territory, an actual if not a confident trespasser upon Shaw's domain. His horse, however, was tethered to a sapling on the safe side of the log, comfortably browsing on Bazelhurst grass. Randolph Shaw, an unseen observer, was considerably mystified by the actions of his unusual visitor.

His lordship paced back and forth with a stride that grew firmer as time brought forth no hostile impediments. His monocle ever and anon was directed both high and low in search of Shaw or his henchmen, while his face was rapidly resolving itself into a bloom of rage.

"Confound him," his lordship was muttering, looking at his timepiece with stern disapproval; "he can't expect me to wait here all day. I'm on his land and I'll stay here as long as I like." (At this juncture he involuntarily measured the distance between himself and the log.) "I knew it was all a bluff, his threat to put me off. Hang it all, where is the fellow? I won't go up to his beastly house. I won't gratify him by going up there even to give him his orders. Demmed cad, blowhard! Five o'clock, confound him! I daresay he's seen me and has crawled off into the underbrush. He's afraid of me; he's a coward. It is as I feared. I can't see the rascal. There's only one thing left for me to do. I'll pin a note to this tree. Confound him, he shall hear from me; he'll *have* to read it."

Whereupon his lordship drew forth a large envelope from his pocket and proceeded to fasten it to the trunk of a big tree which grew in the middle of the road, an act of premeditation which showed strange powers of prophecy. How could he, except by means of clairvoyance, have known before leaving home that he was not to meet his enemy face to face?

As Mr. Shaw afterward read the note and tossed it into the river, it is only fair that the world should know its contents while it hung unfolded to the bark of the tall tree. It said, in a very scrawling hand: "Mr. Shaw, I have looked all over this end of your land for you this afternoon. You doubtless choose to avoid me. So be it. Let me state, once and for all, that your conduct is despicable. I came here personally to tell you to keep off my land, henceforth and forever. I will not repeat this warning, but will instead, if you persist, take such summary measures as would befit a person of your instincts. I trust you will feel the importance of keeping off." To this his lordship bravely signed himself.

"There," he muttered, again holding his watch and fob up for close inspection. "He'll not soon overlook what I've said in that letter, confound him."

He had not observed the approach of Randolph Shaw, who now stood, pipe in hand, some twenty paces behind him in the road.

"What the devil are you doing?" demanded a strong bass voice. It had the effect of a cannon shot.

His lordshop leaped half out of his corduroys, turned with agonizing abruptness toward the tall young man, and gasped "Oh!" so shrilly that his horse looked up with a start. The next instant his watch dropped forgotten from his fingers and his nimble little legs scurried for territory beyond the log. Nor did he pause upon reaching that supposedly safe ground. The swift glance he gave the nearby river was significant as well as apprehensive. It moved him to increased but unpolished haste.

He leaped frantically for the saddle, scorning the stirrups, landing broadside but with sufficient nervous energy in reserve to scramble on and upward into the seat. Once there, he kicked the animal in the flanks with both heels, clutching with his knees and reaching for the bridle rein in the same motion. The horse plunged obediently, but came to a stop with a jerk that almost unseated the rider; the sapling swayed; the good but forgotten rein held firm.

"Ha!" gasped his lordship as the horrid truth became clear to him.

"Charge, Bonaparte!" shouted the man in the road.

"Soldiers?" cried the rider with a wild look among the trees.

"My dog," called back the other. "He charges at the word."

"Well, you know, I saw service in the army," apologized his lordship, with a pale smile. "Get ep!" to the horse.

"What's your hurry?" asked Shaw, grinning broadly as he came up to the log.

"Don't—don't you dare to step over that log," shouted Bazelhurst.

"All right. I see. But, after all, what's the rush?" The other was puzzled for the moment.

"I'm practising, sir," he said unsteadily. "How to mount on a run, demmit. Can't you see?"

"In case of fire, I imagine. Well, you made excellent time. By the way, what has this envelope to do with it?"

"Who are you, sir?"

"Shaw. And you?"

"You'll learn when you read that document. Take it home with you.

"Ah, yes, I see it's for me. Why don't you untie that hitch rein? And what the dickens do you mean by having a hitch rein, anyway? No rider—"

"Confound your impudence, sir, I did not come here to receive instructions from you, dem you," cried his lordship defiantly. He had succeeded at that moment in surreptitiously slashing the hitch rein in two with his pocket-knife. There was nothing now to prevent him from giving the obtrusive young man a defiant farewell. "I am Lord Bazelhurst. Good day, sir!"

"Just a minute, your lordship," called Shaw. "No doubt you were timing yourself a bit ago, but that's no reason why you should leave your watch on my land. Of course, I've nothing against the watch, and, while I promise you faithfully that any human being from your side of the log who ventures over on my side shall be ejected in one way or another, it would seem senseless for me to kick this timepiece into the middle of next week."

"Don't you dare kick that watch. It's a hundred years old."

"Far be it from me to take advantage of anything so old. Don't you want it any longer?"

"Certainly, sir. I wouldn't part from it."

"Then why don't you come over and get it? Do you expect me to break the rule by coming over on to your land to hand it to you?"

"I shouldn't call *that* trespassing, don't you know," began his lordship.

"Ah? Nevertheless, if you want this watch you'll have to come over and get it."

"By Jove, now, that's a demmed mean trick. I'm mounted. Beastly annoying. I say, would you mind *tossing* it up to me?"

"I wouldn't touch it for ten dollars. By the way, I'll just read this note of yours." Lord Bazelhurst nervously watched him as he read; his heart lightened perceptibly as he saw a good-humored smile struggle to the tall young man's face. It was, however, with some misgiving that he studied the broad shoulders and powerful frame of the erstwhile poacher. "Very good of you, I'm sure, to warn me."

"Good of me? It was imperative, let me tell you, sir. No man can abuse my servants and trample all over my land and disturb my fish—"

"Excuse me, but I haven't time to listen to all that. The note's sufficient. You've been practising the running mount until it looks well nigh perfect to me, so I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll step back thirty paces and then you come over and get the watch—if you're not afraid of me—and I'll promise—"

"Afraid? Demmit, sir, didn't I say I was Lord Bazelhurst? Of the Guards, sir, and the Seventy-first? Conf—"

"You come over and get the watch and then see if you can get back to the horse and mount before I get to the log. If I beat you there, you lose. How's that?"

"I decline to make a fool of myself. Either you will restore my watch to me, or I shall instantly go before the authorities and take out a warrant. I came to see you on business, sir, not folly. Lady Bazelhurst herself would have come had I been otherwise occupied, and I want to assure you of her contempt. You are a disgrace to her countrymen. If you ever put foot on our land I shall have you thrown into the river. Demmit, sir, it's no laughing matter. My watch, sir."

"Come and get it."

"Scalawag!"

"By George, do you know if you get too personal I *will* come over there." Randolph Shaw advanced with a threatening scowl.

"Ha, ha!" laughed his lordship shrilly; "I dare you!" He turned his horse's head for home and moved off a yard or more. "Whoa! Curse you! This is the demdest horse to manage I've ever owned. Stand still, confound you! Whoa!"

"He'll stand if you stop licking him."

"Halloa! Hey, Bazelhurst!" came a far distant voice. The adversaries glanced down the road and beheld two horsemen approaching from Bazelhurst Villa—the duke and the count.

"By Jove!" muttered his lordship, suddenly deciding that it would not be convenient for them to appear on the scene at its present stage. "My friends are calling me. Her ladyship doubtless is near at hand. She rides, you know—I mean dem you! Wouldn't have her see you for a fortune. Not another word, sir! You have my orders. Stay off or I'll—

throw you off!" This last threat was almost shrieked and was plainly heard by the two horsemen.

"By Jove, he's facing the fellow," said the duke to the count.

"Ees eet Shaw? Parbleu!"

"I'll send some one for that watch. Don't you dare to touch it," said his lordship in tones barely audible. Then he loped off to meet his friends and turn them back before they came too close for comfort. Randolph Shaw laughed heartily as he watched the retreat. Seeing the newcomers halt and then turn abruptly back into their tracks he picked up the watch and strolled off into the woods, taking a short cut for the dirt road which led up to his house.

"I had him begging for mercy," explained his lordship as he rode along. "I was on his land for half an hour before he would come within speaking distance. Come along. I need a drink."

Young Mr. Shaw came to the road in due time and paused, after his climb, to rest on a stone at the wayside. He was still a mile from home and in the loneliest part of his domain. The Bazelhurst line was scarcely a quarter of a mile behind him. Trees and underbrush grew thick and impenetrable alongside the narrow, winding road; the light of heaven found it difficult to struggle through to the highway below. Picturesque but lonely and sombre indeed were his surroundings.

"Some one coming?" he said aloud, as Bonaparte pricked up his ears and looked up the road. A moment later a horse and rider turned the bend a hundred yards away and came slowly toward him. He started to his feet with an exclamation. The rider was a woman and she was making her way leisurely toward the Bazelhurst lands. "Lady Bazelhurst, I'll bet my hat," thought he with a quiet whistle. "By George, this is awkward. My first trespasser is in petticoats. I say, she's a beauty—a ripping beauty. Lord, Lord, what do such women mean by giving themselves to little rats like Bazelhurst? Oh, the shame of it! Well, it's up to me! If I expect to 'make good,' I've just got to fire her off these grounds."

Naturally he expected to be very polite about it—instinctively so; he could not have been otherwise. The horsewoman saw him step into the middle of the road, smiling oddly, but deferentially; her slim figure straightened, her color rose, and there was a—yes, there was a relieved gleam in her eyes. As she drew near he advanced, hat in hand, his face uplifted in his most winning smile—savoring more of welcome than of repellence.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "doubtless you are not aware that this is proscribed land."

"Then you *are* Mr. Shaw?" she asked, checking her horse with premeditated surprise and an emphasis that puzzled him.

"Yes, madam," he responded gravely, "the hated Shaw. Permit me," and he politely grasped the bridle rein. To her amazement he deliberately turned and began to lead her horse, willy nilly, down the road, very much as if she were a child taking her first riding lesson.

"What are you doing, sir?" she exclaimed sharply. There was a queer flutter of helplessness in her voice.

"Putting you off," he answered laconically. She laughed in delight and he looked up with a relieved smile. "I'm glad you don't mind. I have to do it. These feuds are such beastly things, you know. One has to live up to them whether he likes it or not."

"So you are putting me off your place? Oh, how lovely!"

"It isn't far, you know—just down by those big rocks. Your line is there. Of course," he went on politely, "you know that there *is* a feud."

"Oh, yes; I've heard you discussed. Besides, I met Tompkins and James this morning. Pardon me, Mr. Shaw, but I fancy I can get on without being led. Would you mind—"

"My dear madam, there is no alternative. I have taken a solemn vow personally to eject all Bazelhurst trespassers from my place. You forget that I am, by your orders, to be thrown into the river and all that. Don't be alarmed! I don't mean to throw you into the river."

"By my orders? It seems to me that you have confused me with Lord Bazelhurst."

"Heaven has given me keener perception, your ladyship. I have seen his lordship."

"Ah, may I inquire whether he was particularly rough with you this afternoon?"

"I trust I am too chivalrous to answer that question."

"You are quite dry."

"Thank you. I deserve the rebuke, all right."

"Oh, I mean you haven't been in the river."

"Not since morning. Am I walking too fast for you?"

"Not at all. One couldn't ask to be put off more considerately."

"By Jove," he said involuntarily, his admiration getting the better of him.

"I beg your pardon," with the slightly elevated eyebrows.

"Do you know, you're not at all what I imagined you'd be."

"Oh? And I fancy I'm not at all *whom* you imagined me to be."

"Heavens! Am I ejecting an innocent bystander? You *are* Lady Bazelhurst?"

"I am Penelope Drake. But"—she added quickly—"I *am* an enemy. I am Lord Bazelhurst's sister."

"You—you don't mean it?"

"Are you disappointed? I'm sorry."

"I am staggered and—a bit skeptical. There is no resemblance."

"I *am* a bit taller," she admitted carefully. "It isn't dreadfully immodest, is it, for one to hold converse with her captor? I am in your power, you see."

"On the contrary, it is quite the thing. The heroine always converses with the villain in books. She tells him what she thinks of him."

"But this isn't a book and I'm not a heroine. I am the adventuress. Will you permit me to explain my presence on your land?"

"No excuse is necessary. You were caught red-handed and you don't have to say anything to incriminate yourself further."

"But it is scarcely a hundred feet to our line. In a very few minutes I shall be hurled relentlessly from your land and may never have another chance to tell why I dared to venture over here. You see, you have a haunted house on your land and I—" She hesitated.

"I see. The old Renwood cottage on the hill. Been deserted for years. Renwood brought his wife up here in the mountains long ago and murdered her. She comes back occasionally, they say; mysterious noises and lights and all that. Well?"

"Well, I'm very much interested in spooks. In spite of the feud I rode over here for a peep at the house. Dear me, it's a desolate looking place. I didn't go inside, of course. Why don't you tear it down?"

"And deprive the ghost of house and home? That would be heartless. Besides, it serves as an attraction to bring visitors to my otherwise unalluring place. I'm terribly sorry the fortunes of war prevent me from offering to take you through the house. But as long as you remain a Bazelhurst I can't neglect my vow. Of course, I don't mean to say that you *can't* come and do what you please over here, but you shall be recognized and treated as a trespasser."

"Oh, that's just splendid! Perhaps I'll come to-morrow."

"I shall be obliged to escort you from the grounds, you know."

"Yes, I know," she said agreeably. He looked dazed and delighted. "Of course, I shall come with stealth and darkly. Not even my brother shall know of my plans."

"Certainly not," he said with alacrity. (They were nearing the line.) "Depend on me."

"Depend on you? Your only duty is to scare me off the place."

"That's what I mean. I'll keep sharp watch for you up at the haunted house."

"It's more than a mile from the line," she advised him.

"Yes, I know," said he, with his friendliest smile. "Oh, by the way, would you mind doing your brother a favor, Miss Drake? Give him this watch. He—er—he must have dropped it while pursuing me."

"You *ran?*" she accepted the watch with surprise and unbelief.

"Here is the line, Miss Drake," he evaded. "Consider yourself ignominiously ejected. Have I been unnecessarily rough and expeditious?"

"You have had a long and tiresome walk," she said, settling herself for a merry clip. "Please don't step on our side." He released the bridle rein and doffed his hat.

"I shall bring my horse to-morrow," he remarked significantly.

"I may bring the duke," she said sweetly.

"In that case I shall have to bring an extra man to lead his horse. It won't matter."

"So this rock is the dividing line?"

"Yes; you are on the safe side now—and so am I, for that matter. The line is here," and he drew a broad line in the dust from one side of the road to the other. "My orders are that you are not to ride across that line, at your peril."

"And you are not to cross it either, at *your* peril."

"Do you dare me?" with an eager step forward.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye! I say, are you sure you can find the Renwood cottage?" he called after her. The answer came back through the clatter of hoofs, accompanied by a smile that seduced his self-possession.

"I shall find it in time."

For a long time he stood watching her as she raced down the road.

"At my peril," he mused, shaking his head with a queer smile. "By George, that's fair warning enough. She's beautiful."

At dinner that night the Honorable Penelope restored the watch to her brother, much to his embarrassment, for he had told the duke it was being repaired in town.

"It wasn't this watch that I meant, old chap," he announced, irrelevantly, to the duke, quite red in the face. "Where did you find it, Pen?" She caught the plea in his eye and responded loyally.

"You dropped it, I daresay, in pursuing Mr. Shaw."

The positive radiance which followed dismay in his watery eyes convinced her beyond all doubt that her brother's encounter with the tall Mr. Shaw was not quite creditable to Bazelhurst arms. She listened with pensive indifference to the oft-repeated story of how he had routed the "insufferable cad," encouraged by the support of champagne and the solicited approval of two eye-witnesses. She could not re-press the mixed feelings of scorn, shame, and pity, as she surveyed the array of men who so mercilessly flayed the healthy, fair-faced young man with the gentle strength.

The house party had been augmented during the day by the arrival of half a dozen men and women from the city, brain-fagged, listless, and smart. The big cottage now was full, the company complete for three weeks at least. She looked ahead, this fresh, vigorous young Englishwoman, and wondered how she was to endure the staleness of life.

There was some relief in the thought that the men would make love to the good-looking young married women—at least part of the time—and—but it depressed her in turn to think of the left-over husbands who would make love to her.

"Why is it that Evelyn doesn't have real men here—like this Mr. Shaw?" she found herself wondering vaguely as the night wore on.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH A DOG TRESPASSES

Penelope was a perverse and calculating young person. She was her own mistress and privileged to ride as often as she pleased, but it seemed rather odd—although splendidly decorous—that she did not venture upon Mr. Shaw's estate for more than a week after her first encounter with the feudal baron. If she found a peculiarly feminine satisfaction in speculating on his disappointment, it is not to be wondered at. Womanly insight told her that Randolph Shaw rode forth each day and watched with hawk-like vigilance for the promised trespasser. In his imagination, she could almost hear him curse the luck that was helping her to evade the patrol.

One morning, after a rain, she rode with the duke to the spot where Shaw had drawn his line in the road. She felt a thrill of something she could not define on discovering that the wet soil on the opposite side of the line was disfigured by a mass of fresh hoof-prints. She rejoiced to find that his vigil was incessant and worthy of the respect it imposed. The desire to visit the haunted house was growing more and more irresistible, but she turned it aside with all the relentless perverseness of a woman who feels it worth while to procrastinate.

Truth to tell, Randolph Shaw was going hollow-eyed and faint in his ceaseless, racking watch for trespassers.

Penelope laughed aloud as she gazed upon the tangle of hoof-print. The duke looked as surprised as it was possible for him to look after the wear of the past night.

"Hang it all, Penelope," he said. "I didn't say anything, don't you know."

"I was just thinking," she said hastily, "what fun it would be for us to explore the haunted house."

"Oh, I say, Pen, that's going out of the way for a little fun, isn't it? My word, it's a filthy old house with rats and mice and all that—no place for a ghost, much less a nice little human being like you. They're all like that."

"I think you are afraid to go," said she.

"Afraid of ghosts? Pshaw!" sniffed the duke, sticking out his chest.

"Yes, Shaw! That's whom you're afraid of."

"Now, see here, Pen, you shouldn't say that. Shaw's a d—, a cad. See what Cecil did to him. Remember that? Well, pooh! What would *I* do to him?" Penelope looked him over critically.

"I'll admit that you're larger and younger than Cecil," she confessed grudgingly. "But they say Mr. Shaw is a giant-killer." The duke dropped his monocle and guffawed loudly.

"Good!" he cried in the ecstasy of pride. His worn, dissipated face lighted up with unwonted interest. "I say, Pen, that's the nicest thing you've said to me in a week. You've been so deuced cold of late. I don't understand. I'm not such a bad lot, you know."

"Tell that to Mrs. De Peyton and Mrs. Corwith. They're looking for the good in everything."

"By Jove, I believe you're jealous! This is the proudest moment of my life."

"Don't be silly! And don't try to make love to me any more. Wait until I'm married," she added with a laugh, the irony of which escaped him.

"But, hang it all, suppose you should marry some one else and not me."

"That's what I mean."

"Oh!" he said, perplexed. Then, as if his stupidity called for an explanation: "I had a beastly night. Didn't go to bed till four. But, I say, why can't I have the same privilege as these other chaps? Corwith makes love to you and so does Odwell, and, hang it, they're both married. It's rotten mean of—"

"Their wives are accountable for their manners, not I. But, come; will you go to Renwood's with me?"

"I'd rather talk to you in that nice little corner of the billiard-room at home, if you—"

"But I don't need a brandy and soda. Oh!" This exclamation came with the discovery of an approaching horseman. "It's Mr. Shaw—I'm sure.

Randolph Shaw, loyal to his feudal promise, appeared in the road a couple of hundred yards away. He drew rein and from that distance surveyed the two who were so near to encroaching upon his preserves. He sat straight and forbidding in the saddle. For a full minute the two factions stared at each other. Then, without a sign of recognition, Shaw turned and rode rapidly away.

"He rides like a gentleman," commented Miss Drake, after reflection.

"Indian blood in him," remarked her companion.

"Let us go home," said she, whirling her horse like a flash. The duke had some difficulty in keeping abreast of her during the ride and he lost sight of her altogether after they dismounted at Bazelhurst Villa.

The momentary glimpse of a real man set Penelope's opinions on edge for the remainder of the day and night. Shaw, whatever else he might be, was a man. Even while others addressed her in conversation she was absent-mindedly recalling to memory certain English gentlemen at home who could stand comparison with this handsome fellow across the danger line. But to compare any one of the men in Lady Bazelhurst's house party—oh, it was absurd! She looked them over. Dull-eyed, blasé, frayed by the social whirl, worn out, pulseless, all of them. They talked automobile, bridge, women, and self in particular; in the seclusion of a tête-à-tête they talked love with an ardor that lost most of its danger because it was from force of habit. One of the men was even now admitting in her ear that he had not spent an evening alone with his wife in four years.

"There's always something doing," he said. "A week or two ago, by Jove, you wouldn't believe it, but we had an evening turn up without a thing on hand. Strangest thing I ever knew. Neither of us had a thing on. We said we'd stay at home and go to bed early, just to see how it felt. Well, what do you think? We sat up and read till half past ten o'clock and then both of us thought of it at the same time. We dressed and went down to Rector's and waited for the theatres to let out. Three o'clock when we got home. You can't imagine what a queer experience it is, being all alone with one's wife."

"Don't you love your wife, Mr. Odwell?"

"Certainly! but there's always a crowd." Both of them glanced over at pretty Mrs. Odwell. She was looking down at her plate demurely while Reggie Van Voort talked straight into her pink ear, his eyes gleaming with the zest of invasion. "I say, Miss Drake, you won't mind talking to me a while after dinner, will you?" went on Odwell, something like relief in his voice.

After dinner she was obliged to set him straight in a little matter. They were sitting on the terrace and he had thrown away his half-smoked cigarette, an act in itself significant. She had been listening patiently, from sheer habit and indifference, to what he was saying, but at last she revolted.

"Don't! You shall not say such things to me. I am not your kind, I fancy, Mr. Odwell," she said. "I don't know why you should tell me of your chorus-girl friends—of your suppers and all that. I don't care to hear of them and I don't intend that you shall use me as a subject of illustration. I am going upstairs."

"Oh, come now, that's rather rough, just as we were getting on so well. All the fellows do the same—"

"I know. You need not tell me. And you all have wives at home, too," with intense scorn.

"Now, that's where you wrong us. They're *not* at home, you know. That's just it."

"Never mind, Mr. Odwell; I'm going in." She left him and entered the house. For a minute or two he looked after her in wonder, and then, softly whistling, made his way over to where De Peyton, through some oversight, was talking to his own wife. De Peyton unceremoniously announced that he was going upstairs to write a letter.

Penelope, flushed with disgust and humiliation, drew near a crowd of men and women in the long living-room. Her brother was haranguing the assemblage, standing forth among them like an unconquered bantam. In spite of herself, she felt a wave of shame and pity creep over her as she looked at him.

"Barminster says the fellow ran when he saw him to-day," his lordship was saying. "But that doesn't help matters. He had been on my land again and again, Tompkins says, and Tompkins ought to know."

"And James, too," said the duke with a brandied roar.

"Can't Tompkins and his men keep that man off my land?" demanded Lady Bazelhurst. Every one took note of the pronoun. Her ladyship's temples seemed to narrow with hatred. Bazelhurst had told the men privately that she was passing sleepless nights in order to "hate that fellow Shaw" to her full capacity.

"My dear, I have given positive orders to Tompkins and he swears he'll carry them out," said he hastily.

"I suppose Tompkins is to throw him into the river again."

"He is to shoot that fellow Shaw if he doesn't keep off our land. I've had enough of it. They say he rode his confounded plough horse all over the west end the other day." Penelope smiled reflectively. "Trampled the new fern beds out of existence and all that. Hang him, Tompkins will get him if he persists. He has told the men to take a shot at the rascal on sight. Tompkins doesn't love him, you know."

Penelope went her way laughing and—forgot the danger that threatened Randolph Shaw.

The next morning, quite early, she was off for a canter. Some magnetic force drew her toward that obliterated line in the roadway. Almost as she came up to it and stopped, Randolph Shaw rode down the hillside through the trees and drew rein directly opposite, the noses of their horses almost touching. With a smile he gave the military salute even as she gasped in self-conscious dismay.

"On duty, Miss Drake. No trespassing," he said. There was a glad ring in his voice. "Please don't run away. You're on the safe side."

"I'm not going to run," she said, her cheek flushing. "How do you know where the line is? It has been destroyed by the ravages of time."

"Yes. It has seemed a year. This thing of acting sentinel so religiously is a bit wearing." His great, friendly dog came across the line, however, and looked bravely up into the enemy's face, wagging his tail. "Traitor! Come back, Bonaparte," cried his master.

"What a beautiful dog," she cried, sincere admiration in her eyes. "I love a big dog. He is your best friend, I'll wager.'

"'Love me, love my dog,' is my motto."

The conversation was not prolonged. Penelope began to find herself on rather friendly terms with the enemy. Confusion came over her when she remembered that she was behaving in a most unmaidenly manner. Doubtless that was why she brought the meeting to a close by galloping away.

The ways of fortune are strange, look at them from any point of view. Surprising as it may seem, a like encounter happened on the following day and—aye, on the day after and every day for a week or more. Occasions there were when Penelope was compelled to equivocate shamefully in order to escape the companionship of the duke, the count, or others of their ilk. Once, when the guardian of the road was late at his post, she rode far into the enemy's country, actually thrilled by the joy of adventure. When he appeared far down the road, she turned and fled with all the sensations of a culprit. And he thundered after her with vindictiveness that deserved better results. Across the line she drew rein and faced him defiantly, her hair blown awry, her cheeks red, her eyes sparkling.

"No trespass!" she cried, holding up her gloved hand. He stopped short, for that was one of the terms of truce.

The next day he again was missing, but she was not to be caught by his stratagem. Instead of venturing into the trap he had prepared for her, she remained on her side of the line, smiling at the thought of him in hiding far up the road. If any one had suggested to her that she was developing too great an interest in this stalwart gentleman, she would have laughed him to scorn. It had not entered her mind to question herself as to the pleasure she found in being near him. She was founding her actions on the basis that he was a real man and that the little comedy of adventure was quite worth while.

At length an impatient line appeared on her fair brow, a resentful gleam in her eyes. His remissness was an impertinence! It was the last time she would come—but a sudden thought struck her like a blow. She turned white and red by turns. Had he tired of the sport? Had the novelty worn off? Was he laughing at her for a silly coquette? The riding crop came down sharply upon her horse's flank and a very deeply agitated young woman galloped off toward Bazelhurst Villa, hurrying as though afraid he might catch sight of her in flight.

A quarter of a mile brought a change in her emotions. British stubbornness arose to combat an utter rout. After all, why should she run away from him? With whimsical bravado, she turned off suddenly into the trail that led to the river, her color deepening with the consciousness that, after all, she was vaguely hoping she might see him somewhere before the morning passed. Through the leafy pathway she rode at a snail's pace, brushing the low-hanging leaves and twigs from about her head with something akin to petulance. As she neared the river the neighing of a horse hard by caused her to sit erect with burning ears. Then she relapsed into a smile, remembering that it might have come from the game warden's horse. A moment later her searching eyes caught sight of Shaw's horse tied to a sapling and on Bazelhurst ground, many hundred feet from his own domain. She drew in sharply and looked about in considerable trepidation. Off to the right lay the log that divided the lands, but nowhere along the bank of the river could she see the trespasser. Carefully she resumed her way, ever on the lookout, puzzled not a little by the unusual state of affairs.

Near the river trail she came upon the man, but he paid no heed to her approach. He sat with his face in his hands and—she could not believe her eyes and ears—he was sobbing bitterly. For an instant her lips curled in the smile of scornful triumph and then something like disgust came over her. There was mockery in her voice as she called out to him.

"Have you stubbed your toe, little boy?"

He looked up, dazed. Then he arose, turning his back while he dashed his hand across his eyes. When he glanced back at her he saw that she was smiling. But she also saw something in his face that drove the smile away. Absolute rage gleamed in his eyes.

"So it is real war," he said hoarsely, his face quivering. "Your pitiful cowards want it to be real, do they? Well, that's what it shall be, hang them! They shall have all they want of it! Look! This is their way of fighting, is it? Look!"

He pointed to his feet. Her bewildered eyes saw that his hand was bloody and a deathly sickness came over her. He was pointing to the outstretched, inanimate form of the dog that had been his friend and comrade. She knew that the beast was dead and she knew that her brother's threat had not been an idle one. A great wave of pity and horror swept over her. Moisture sprang to her eyes on the moment.

"He—he is dead?" she exclaimed.

"Yes—and killed by some cowardly brute whose neck I'd like to wring. That dog—my Bonaparte—who knew no feud, who did no wrong! Your brother wants war, does he? Well, I'll give him all—"

"But my brother could not have done a thing like this," she cried, slipping from her saddle and advancing toward him quickly. "Oh, no, no! Not this! He is not that sort, I know. It must have been an accident and—"

"Accident! Don't come near me! I mean it. God, my heart is too full of vengeance. Accident? Is this blood on my arm accidental? Bah! It was a deliberate attempt to murder me!"

"You? You, too?" she gasped, reeling.

"Yes—they've winged me, too. Oh, God, if I only had been armed. There *would* have been a killing!"

"Let me see—let me help you!" she cried, coming up to his side, white-faced and terrified. "I won't stay away! You are hurt. Please! Please! I am not your enemy."

For a long minute he held back, savagely resentful, glowering upon her, then his face softened and his hand went out to clasp hers.

"I knew you had nothing to do with it. Forgive me—forgive my rudeness. Don't be alarmed about me. Two or three scattered shot struck me in the arm. The fellow's aim was bad when it came to me. But he—he got the dog! Poor old Bonaparte! It's as if he were a—a brother, Miss Drake. I loved him and he loved me."

"You must let me see your arm. I will not take no for an answer. It must need attention—"

"Believe me, it is nothing. I have tied my handkerchief about it—two little shot, that's all. The first charge riddled the dog. But I forget. I am still on your sister's land. At any minute I may be shot from behind some tree. I—I couldn't help crying, Miss Drake. It was cruel—fiendish! Now, if you'll permit me, I'll take my dead off of your land."

"Stop! I must know about it. Tell me; how did it happen?"

"I can't talk about it to you."

"Why not? Do you think I condone this outrage? Do you think I can support such means of warfare? You do not know me, Mr. Shaw; you do not know an Englishwoman's love of fairness."

"By Jove, do you mean it?" his eyes lighted up. "But, after all, you belong to the other camp, he added dejectedly. "I—I wish to heavens, Miss Drake, you were not one of them!"

"My brother—Cecil would not have permitted this," she tried to apologize, remembering with a cold heart that Lord Bazelhurst had given the very instructions of which this was the result.

"We can't discuss it, Miss Drake. Some one from your side of the line killed my dog and then fired at me. I'll admit I was trespassing, but not until the dog was shot. He was on Lady Bazelhurst's land when he was shot. It was not until after that that I trespassed, if you are pleased to call it such. But I was unarmed; hang the luck!" The way he said it conveyed much to her understanding.

"Tell me, please."

"I've had murder in my heart for half an hour, Miss Drake. Somehow you soothe me." He sat down on the log again and leaned his head upon his hand. With his eyes upon the dead dog he went on, controlling his anger with an effort: "I rode down the river road this morning for a change, intending to go up later on to our trysting place through the wood." She heard him call it a trysting place without a thought of resentment or shame. "When I came to the log there I stopped, but Bonaparte, lawless old chap, kept on. I paid no attention to him, for I was thinking of—of something else. He had raced around in the forbidden underbrush for some time before I heard the report of a gun near at hand. The dog actually screamed like a human being. I saw him leap up from the ground and then roll over. Of course, I—well, I trespassed. Without thinking of my own safety I flew to where the dog was lying. He looked up into my face and whined just as he died. I don't remember how I got off the horse. The next I knew I was rushing blindly into the brush toward a place where I saw smoke, cursing like a fiend. Then came the second shot and the stinging in my arm. It brought me to my senses. I stopped and a moment later I saw a man running down along the bank of the stream. I—oh, well, there isn't any more to tell. I don't know who fired the shots. I couldn't see his face."

"It was Tompkins," she cried. "I know it was. He had his orders—" but she checked herself in confusion.

"His orders? Do you mean to say—Miss Drake, did your brother instruct him to kill me?" She quailed beneath his look.

"—I can't say anything more about it, Mr. Shaw," she murmured, so piteously that he was touched. For a seemingly interminable length of time his hard eyes looked into hers and then they softened.

"I understand," he said simply. "You cannot talk about it. I'll not ask any questions."

"My brother is weak in her hands," she managed to say in extenuation.

"After all, it isn't a pleasant subject. If you don't mind, we'll let it drop—that is, between you and me, Miss Drake. I hope the war won't break off our—"

"Don't suggest it, please! I'd rather you wouldn't. We are friends, after all. I thought it was playing at war—and I can't tell you how shocked I am."

"Poor old Bonaparte!" was all he said in reply. She stooped and laid her hand on the fast-chilling coat of the dog. There were tears in her eyes as she arose and turned away, moving toward her horse. Shaw deliberately lifted the dead animal into his arms and strode off toward his own land. She followed after a moment of indecision, leading the horse. Across the line he went and up the side of the knoll to his right. At the foot of a great tree he tenderly deposited his burden. Then he turned to find her almost beside him.

"You won't mind my coming over here, will you?" she asked softly. He reached out and clasped her hand, thoughtlessly, with his blood-covered fingers. It was not until long afterward that she discovered his blood upon the hand from which she had drawn her riding glove.

"*You* are always welcome" he said. "I am going to bury him here this afternoon. No, please don't come. I'll bring the men down to help me. I suppose they think I'm a coward and a bounder over at your place. Do you remember the challenge you gave me yesterday? You dared me to come over the line as far into Bazelhurst land as you had come into mine. Well, I dared last night."

"You dared? You came?"

"Yes, and I went farther than you have gone, because I thought it was play, comedy, fun. I even sat upon your gallery, just outside the billiard-room—and smoked two cigarettes. You'll find the stubs on the porch railing if her ladyship's servants are not too exemplary." She was looking at him in wide-eyed unbelief. "I was there when you came out on the lawn with the Frenchman."

"Did you hear what he was—what we were saying?" she asked, nervously and going pale.

"No. I was not eavesdropping. Besides, you returned to the house very abruptly, if you remember."

"Yes, I remember," she said, a sigh of relief accompanying the warm glow that came to her cheek. "But were you not afraid of being discovered? How imprudent of you!"

"It was a bit risky, but I rather enjoyed it. The count spoke to me as I left the place. It was dark and he mistook me for one of your party. I couldn't wait to see if you returned to renew the tête-à-tête—"

"I did not return," she said. It was his turn to be relieved.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH THE TRUTH TRESPASSES

Lord and Lady Bazelhurst, with the more energetic members of their party, spent the day in a so-called hunting excursion to the hills south of the Villa. Toward nightfall they returned successfully empty-handed and rapacious for bridge. Penelope, full of smouldering anger, had spent the afternoon in her room, disdaining every call of sociability. She had awakened to the truth of the situation in so far as she was concerned. She was at least seeing things from Shaw's point of view. Her resentment was not against the policy of her brother, but the overbearing, petulant tyranny of her American sister-in-law. From the beginning she had disliked Evelyn; now she despised her. With the loyal simplicity of a sister she absolved Cecil of all real blame in the outrage of the morning, attributing everything to the cruelty and envy of the despot who held the purse-strings from which dangled the pliable fortunes of Bazelhurst. The Bazelhursts, one and all—ancestors thrown in—swung back and forth on the pendulum of her capriciousness. Penelope, poor as a church mouse, was almost wholly dependent upon her brother, who in turn owed his present affluence to the more or less luckless movement of the matrimonial market.

The girl had a small, inadequate income—so small it was almost worth jesting about.

Here was Penelope, twenty-two, beautiful, proud, fair-minded, and healthy, surveying herself for the first time from a new and an entirely different point of view. She was not pleased with the picture. She began to loathe herself more than she pitied her brother. Something like a smile came into her clouded face as she speculated on Randolph Shaw's method of handling Evelyn Banks had she fallen to him as a wife. The quiet power in that man's face signified the presence of a manhood that—ah, and just here it occurred to her that Lady Bazelhurst felt the force of that power even though she never had seen the man. She hated him because he was strong enough to oppose her, to ignore her, to laugh at her impotence.

The smouldering anger and a growing sense of fairness combined at length in the determination to take her brother and his wife to task for the morning's outrage, let the consequences be what they might. When she joined the people downstairs before dinner, there was a red spot in each cheek and a steady look in her eyes that caused the duke to neglect woefully the conversation he was carrying on with Mrs. Odwell.

Dinner was delayed for nearly half an hour while four of the guests finished their "rubber." Penelope observed that the party displayed varying emotions. It afterward transpired that the hunters had spent most of the afternoon in her ladyship's distant lodge playing bridge for rather high stakes. Little Miss Folsom was pitifully unresponsive to the mirth of Mr. Odwell. She could ill afford to lose six hundred dollars. Lady Bazelhurst was in a frightful mood. Her guests had so far forgotten themselves as to win more than a thousand dollars of the Banks legacy and she was not a cheerful loser—especially as his lordship had dropped an additional five hundred. The winners were riotously happy. They had found the sport glorious. An observer, given to deductions, might have noticed that half of the diners were immoderately hilarious, the other half studiously polite.

Lord Bazelhurst wore a hunted look and drank more than one or two highballs. From time to time he cast furtive glances at his wife. He laughed frequently at the wrong time and mirthlessly.

"He's got something on his mind," whispered Odwell in comment.

"Yes; he always laughs when there is anything on his mind," replied Mrs. De Peyton. "That's the way he gets it off."

After dinner no one proposed cards. The party edged off into twos and threes and explained how luck had been with or against them. Penelope, who could not afford to play for stakes, and had the courage to say so, sat back and listened to the conversation of her brother and the group around him.

The duke was holding forth on the superiority of the Chinese over the Japanese as servants and Bazelhurst was loudly defending the Japanese navy.

"Hang it all, Barminster, the Japs could eat 'em up," he proclaimed. "Couldn't they?" to the crowd.

"I'm talking about servants, Cecil," observed the duke.

"And shoot? Why, they're the greatest gunners in the world. By Jove, I read somewhere the other day that they had hit what they shot at three million times out of—or, let me see, was it the Prussians who fired three million rounds and—"

"Oh, let's change the subject," said the duke in disgust. "What's become of that Shaw fellow?" Penelope started and flushed, much to her chagrin. At the sound of Shaw's name Lady Bazelhurst, who was passing with the count, stopped so abruptly that her companion took half a dozen paces without her.

"Shaw? By Jove, do you know, I'd completely forgotten that fellow," exclaimed Cecil.

"I thought you were going to shoot him, or shoot at him, or something like that. Can't you get him in range?"

"Oh, I wasn't really in earnest about that, Barminster. You know we couldn't shoot at a fellow for such a thing—"

"Nonsense, Cecil," said his wife. "You shoot poachers in England."

"But this fellow isn't a poacher. He's a—a gentleman, I daresay—in some respects—not all, of course, my dear, but—"

"Gentleman? Ridiculous!" scoffed his wife.

"I—yes, quite right—a ridiculous gentleman, of course. Ha, ha! Isn't he, Barminster? But with all that, you know, I couldn't have Tompkins shoot him. He asked me the other day if he should take a shot at Shaw's legs, and I told him not to do anything so absurd." Penelope's heart swelled with relief, and for the first time that evening she looked upon her brother with something like sisterly regard.

"It didn't matter, however," said Lady Evelyn sharply. "I gave him instructions yesterday to shoot any trespasser from that side of the line. I can't see that we owe Mr. Shaw any especial consideration. He has insulted and ignored me at every opportunity. Why should he be permitted to trespass more than any other common lawbreaker? If he courts a charge of birdshot he should not expect to escape scot free. Birdshot wouldn't kill a man, you know, but it would—

But Penelope could restrain herself no longer. The heartlessness of her sister-in-law overcame her prudence, and she interrupted the scornful mistress of the house, her eyes blazing, but her voice under perfect control. Her tall young figure was tense, and her fingers clasped the back of Miss Folsom's chair rather rigidly.

"I suppose you know what happened this morning," she said, with such apparent restraint that every one looked at her expectantly.

"Do you mean in connection with Mr.—with Jack-the-Giant-Killer?" asked her ladyship, her eyes brightening.

"Some one of your servants shot him this morning," said Penelope with great distinctness. There was breathless silence in the room.

"Shot him?" gasped Lord Bazelhurst, his thin red face going very white.

"Not—not fatally?" exclaimed Evelyn, aghast in spite of herself.

"No. The instructions were carried out. His wound in the arm is trifling. But the coward was not so generous when it came to the life of his innocent, harmless dog. He killed the poor thing. Evelyn, it's—it's like murder."

"Oh," cried her ladyship, relieved. "He killed the dog. I daresay Mr. Shaw has come to realize at last that we are earnest in this. Of course I am glad that the man is not badly hurt. Still, a few shot in the arm will hardly keep him in bounds. His legs were intended," she laughed lightly. "What miserable aim Tompkins must take."

"He's a bit off in his physiology, my dear," said Cecil, with a nervous attempt at humor. He did not like the expression in his sister's face. Somehow, he was ashamed.

"Oh, it's bad enough," said Penelope. "It was his left arm —the upper arm, too. I think the aim was rather good."

"Pray, how do you know all of this, Penelope?" asked her ladyship, lifting her eyebrows. "I've heard that you see Mr. Shaw occasionally, but you can't be his physician, I'm sure."

Penelope flushed to the roots of her hair, but suppressed the retort which would have been in keeping with the provocation.

"Oh, dear, no!" she replied. "I'm too soft-hearted to be a physician. I saw Mr. Shaw just after the—ah—the incident."

"You shaw Saw—I mean you saw Shaw?" gasped Bazelhurst.

"She sees him frequently, Cecil. It was not at all unusual that she should have seen him to-day. I daresay he waited to show you his wound before going to a surgeon."

Penelope could not resist the temptation to invent a story befitting the moment. Assuming a look of concern, she turned to her brother and said: "He is coming to see you about it to-morrow, and he is coming armed to the teeth, attended by a large party of friends. Mr. Shaw says he will have satisfaction for the death of that dog if he has to shoot everybody on the place."

"Good Lord!" cried the duke. There was instant excitement. "I believe the wretch will do it, too."

"Oh, I say, Bazelhurst, settle with him for the dog," said De Peyton nervously. He looked at his watch and then at his wife. The entire party now was listening to the principal speakers.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Lady Evelyn. "He won't come. It's all bluster. Don't let it frighten you, Cecil. I know the manner of man."

"I wish you could have seen him this morning," murmured Penelope, thoroughly enjoying the unexpected situation. Her conscience was not troubled by the prevarication.

"By Jove, I think it would be wise to send over and find out what he valued the brute at," said Cecil, mopping his brow.

"Good. We'll send Penelope to act as ambassador," said her ladyship. "She seems to be on friendly terms with the enemy."

"To act as ambassador from Cowardice Court?" questioned Penelope, loftily, yet with cutting significance. "No, I thank you. I decline the honor. Besides," with a reflective frown, "I don't believe it is diplomacy he's after."

"I say what the deuce do you suppose the confounded savage has in mind?" exclaimed the duke. "I've heard of the way these cowboys settle their affairs. You don't imagine—" and he paused significantly.

"It looks like it's going to be a da—rather disagreeable affair," said De Peyton sourly.

"Good heavens, what are we to do if he comes here with a lot of desperadoes and begins to shoot?" cried Mrs. Odwell, genuinely alarmed. "I've read so much of these awful mountain feuds."

"Don't be alarmed. Lord Bazelhurst will attend to the gentleman," said Lady Evelyn blandly. His lordship's monocle clattered down and the ice rattled sharply in his glass.

"To—to be sure," he agreed. "Don't be in the least worried. I'll attend to the upstart. What time's he coming, Pen?"

A door banged noisily near by, and every one jumped as though a gun had been fired. While the "ohs" were still struggling from their lips, Hodder, the butler, came into the room, doing his best to retain his composure under what seemed to be trying circumstances.

"What is it, Hodder?" demanded her ladyship.

"The cook, your ladyship. She's fallen downstairs and broken her leg," announced Hodder. He did not betray it, but he must have been tremendously surprised by the sigh of relief that went up on all sides. Lord Bazelhurst went so far as to laugh.

"Ha, ha! is that all?"

"Oh, dear, I'm so glad!" cried Miss Folsom, impulsively. "I was frightened half to death. It might have been Mr.—"

"Don't be silly, Rose," said Lady Bazelhurst. "Where is she, Hodder?"

"In the laundry, your ladyship. There are two fractures."

"By Jove, two legs instead of one, then—worse than I thought," cried Bazelhurst, draining his glass.

"Send at once for a doctor, Hodder, and take her to her room. Isn't it annoying," said her ladyship. "It's so difficult to keep a cook in the mountains."

"Don't see how she can get away without legs," observed De Peyton.

"I'll come with you, Hodder. Perhaps I can do something for her," said Penelope, following the butler from the room.

"Don't take too many patients on your hands, my dear," called the mistress, with a shrill laugh.

"Yes; remember to-morrow," added the duke. Then, suddenly: "I believe I'll lend a hand." He hurried after Penelope, rather actively for him.

Lord Bazelhurst visited his wife's room later in the night, called there by a more or less peremptory summons. Cecil had been taking time by the forelock in anticipation of Shaw's descent in the morning and was inclined to jocundity.

"Cecil, what do you think of Penelope's attitude toward Mr. Shaw?" she asked, turning away from the window which looked out over the night in the direction of Shaw's place.

"I didn't know she had an attitude," replied he, trying to focus his wavering gaze upon her.

"She meets him clandestinely and she supports him openly. Isn't that an attitude, or are you too drunk to see it?"

"My dear, remember you are speaking of my sister," he said with fine dignity but little discrimination. "Besides, I am not too drunk. I *do* see it. It's a demmed annoying attitude. She's a traitor, un'stand me? A traito-tor. I intend to speak to her about it."

"It is better that you should do it," said his wife. "I am afraid I could not control my temper."

"Penelope's a disgrace—an absolute disgrace. How many legs did Hodder say she'd—she'd broken?"

"Oh, you're disgusting!" cried Lady Evelyn. "Go to bed! I thought I could talk to you to-night, but I can't. You scarcely can stand up."

"Now, Evelyn, you do me injustice. I'm only holding to this chair to keep it from moving 'round the room. See that? Course I c'n stan' up," he cried, triumphantly.

"I am utterly disgusted with you. Oh, for a man! A man with real blood in his veins, a man who could do something besides eat and drink at my cost. I pay your debts, clothe you, feed you—house your ungrateful sister—and what do I get in return? *This!*"

Lord Bazelhurst's eyes steadied beneath this unexpected assault, his legs stiffened, his shoulders squared themselves in a pitiful attempt at dignity.

"Lady Bazelhurst, you—you—" and then he collapsed into the chair, bursting into maudlin tears. She stood over by the dressing-table and looked pitilessly upon the weak creature whose hiccoughing sobs filled the room. Her color was high, her breathing heavy. In some way it seemed as though there was so much more she could have said had the circumstances been different.

There came a knock at the door, but she did not respond. Then the door opened quietly and Penelope entered the room, resolutely, fearlessly. Evelyn turned her eyes upon the intruder and stared for a moment.

"Did you knock?" she asked at last.

"Yes. You did not answer."

"Wasn't that sufficient?"

"Not to-night, Evelyn. I came to have it out with you and Cecil. Where is he?"

"There!"

"Asleep?" with a look of amazement.

"I hope not. I should dislike having to call the servants to carry him to his room."

"I see. Poor old chap!" She went over and shook him by the shoulder. He sat up and stared at her blankly through his drenched eyes. Then, as if the occasion called for a supreme effort, he tried to rise, ashamed that his sister should have found him in his present condition. "Don't get up, Cecil. Wait a bit and I'll go to your room with you."

"What have you to say to me, Penelope?" demanded Evelyn, a green light in her eyes.

"I can wait. I prefer to have Cecil—understand," she said, bitterly.

"If it's about our affair with Shaw, it won't make any difference whether Cecil understands or not. Has your friend asked you to plead for him? Does he expect me to take him up on your account and have him here?"

"I was jesting when I said he would come to-morrow," said Penelope, ignoring the thrust and hurrying to her subject. "I couldn't go to sleep to-night if I neglected to tell you what I think of the outrage this morning. You and Cecil had no right to order Tompkins to shoot at Mr. Shaw. He is not a trespasser. Some one killed his dog to-day. When he pursued the coward, a second shot was fired at him. He was wounded. Do you call that fair fighting? Ambushed, shot from behind a tree. I don't care what you and Cecil think about it, I consider it despicable. Thank God, Cecil was not really to blame. It is about the only thing I can say to my brother's credit."

Lady Bazelhurst was staring at her young sister-in-law with wide eyes. It was the first time in all her petted, vain life that any one had called her to account. She was, at first, too deeply amazed to resent the sharp attack.

"Penelope Drake!" was all she could say. Then the fury in her soul began to search for an outlet. "How dare you? How dare you?"

"I don't mean to hurt you. I am only telling you that your way of treating this affair is a mistake. It can be rectified. You don't want to be lawless; you don't understand what a narrow escape from murder you have had. Evelyn, you owe reparation to Mr. Shaw. He is—"

"I understand why you take his side. You cheapen and degrade yourself and you bring shame upon your brother and me by your disgraceful affair with this ruffian. Don't look shocked! You meet him secretly, I know—how much farther you have gone with him I don't know. It is enough that you—"

"Stop! You shall not say such things to me!"

"You came in here to have it out with me. Well, we'll have it out. You think because you're English, and all that, that you are better than I. You show it in your every action; you turn up your nose at me because I am an American. Well, what if I am? Where would you be if it were not for me? And where would *he* be? You'd starve if it were not for me. You hang to me like a leech—you sponge on me, you gorge yourself—"

"That is enough, Evelyn. You have said all that is necessary. I deserve it, too, for meddling in your affairs. It may satisfy you to know that I have always despised you. Having confessed, I can only add that we cannot live another hour under the same roof. You need not order me to go. I shall do so of my own accord—gladly." Penelope turned to the door. She was as cold as ice.

"It is the first time you have ever done anything to please me. You may go in the morning."

"I shall go to-night!"

"As you like. It is near morning. Where do you expect to go at this hour of night?"

"I am not afraid of the night. To-morrow I shall send over from the village for my trunks." She paused near the door and then came back to Cecil's side. "Good-bye, Cecil. I'll write. Good-bye." He looked up with a hazy smile.

"G'night," he muttered thickly.

Without another word or so much as a glance at Lady Bazelhurst, Penelope Drake went swiftly from the room. The big hall clock struck the half-hour after eleven. Some one—a woman—was laughing in the billiard-room below; the click of the balls came to her ears like the snapping of angry teeth. She did not hesitate; it was not in her nature. The room in which she had found so much delight was now loathsome to her. With nervous fingers she threw the small things she most cherished into a bag—her purse, her jewels, her little treasures. Somehow it seemed to her as if she were hurrying to catch a night train, that was all. With her own strong young arms she dragged the two huge trunks from the closet. Half an hour later they were full and locked. Then she looked about with a dry, mirthless smile.

"I wonder where I *am* to go?" she murmured, half aloud. A momentary feeling of indecision attacked her. The click of the balls had ceased, the clock had struck twelve. It was dark and still, and the wind was crying in the trees.

. . . .

"She won't go," Lady Bazelhurst was saying to herself, as she sat, narrow-eyed and hateful, in her window looking out into the night. "Life is too easy here." The light from the porch lanterns cast a feeble glow out beyond the porte-cochère and down the drive. As she stared across the circle, the figure of a woman suddenly cut a diametric line through it, and lost itself in the wall of blackness that formed the circumference. Lady Evelyn started and stared unbelievingly into the darkness, striving to penetrate it with her gaze.

"It was she—Penelope," she cried, coming to her feet. "She's really gone—she meant it." For many minutes she peered out into the night, expecting to see the shadow returning. A touch of anxious hope possessing her, she left the window and hurried down the corridor to Penelope's room. What she found there was most convincing. It was not a trick of the lanterns. The shadow had been real. It must be confessed that the peevish heart of Lady Bazelhurst beat rather rapidly as she hastened back to the window to peer anxiously out into the sombre park with its hooting owls and chattering night-bugs. The mournful yelp of a distant dog floated across the black valley. The watcher shuddered as she recalled stories of panthers that had infested the great hills. A small feeling of shame and regret began to develop with annoying insistence.

An hour dragged itself by before she arose petulantly, half terrified, half annoyed in spite of herself. Her husband still was sitting in the big chair, his face in his hands. His small, dejected figure appealed to her pity for the first time in the two years of their association. She realized what her temper had compelled her to say to him and to his sister; she saw the insults that at least one of them had come to resent.

"I hope that foolish girl will come back," she found herself saying, with a troubled look from the window. "Where can the poor thing go? What will become of her? What will everyone say when this becomes known?" she cried, with fresh selfishness. "I—I should not have let her go like this."

Even as she reproached herself, a light broke in upon her understanding; a thought whirled into her brain and a moment later a shrill, angry, hysterical laugh came from her lips.

"She knew where she could go! How simple I am. Shaw will welcome her gladly. She's with him by this time—his doors have opened to her. The little wretch! And I've been trying so hard to pity her!" She laughed again so shrilly that his lordship stirred and then looked up at her stupefied, uncertain.

"Hullo," he grunted. "What time is it?"

"Oh, you're awake, are you?" scornfully.

"Certainly. Have I been dozing? What's there to laugh at, my dear?" he mumbled, arising very unsteadily. "Where's Pen?"

"She's gone. She's left the house," she said, recurring dread and anxiety in her voice. A glance at the darkness outside brought back the growing shudders.

"What—what d'ye mean?" demanded he, bracing up with a splendid effort.

"She's left the house, that's all. We quarrelled. I don't know where she's gone. Yes, I do know. She's gone to Shaw's for the night. She's with him. I saw her going," she cried, striving between fear and anger.

"You've—you've turned her out?" gasped Lord Bazelhurst, numbly. "In the night? Good Lord, why—why did you let her go?" He turned and rushed toward the door, tears springing to his eyes. He was sobering now and the tears were wrenched from his hurt pride. "How long ago?"

"An hour or more. She went of her own accord. You'll find her at Shaw's," said her ladyship harshly. She hated to admit that she was to blame. But as her husband left the room, banging the door after him, she caught her breath several times in a futile effort to stay the sobs, and then broke down and cried, a very much abused young woman. She hated everybody and everything.

COWARDICE COURT

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH DAN CUPID TRESPASSES

Lady Bazelhurst was right. Penelope was making her way through the blackest of nights toward the home of Randolph Shaw. In deciding upon this step, after long deliberation, she had said to herself: "Randolph Shaw is the only real man I've seen since coming to the mountains. I can trust him to help me to-night."

It was fully three miles to Shaw's place, most of the way over the narrow valley road. She knew she would encounter but few tortuous places. The last half-mile, however, was steep, rugged, and unfamiliar to her. She had ventured no nearer to his home than Renwood's deserted cottage, lying above and to the south of the road, almost at the base of the long hill on whose side Shaw had built his big home. To climb that hill was no easy task in daylight; at midnight, with the stars obscured by clouds and tree-tops, there was something perilously uncertain in the prospect.

Only the knowledge that patience and courage eventually would bring her to the end made the journey possible. Time would lead her to the haven; care would make the road a friend; a stout heart was her best ally. Strength of limb and strength of purpose she had, in use and in reserve. No power could have made her turn back willingly. Her anxious eyes were set ahead in the blackness; her runaway feet were eager in obedience to her will.

"Why couldn't I have put it off until morning?" she was saying to herself as she passed down the gravelled drive and advanced to meet the wall of trees that frowned blackly in her face. "What will he think? What will he say? Oh, he'll think I'm such a silly, romantic fool. No, he won't. He'll understand. He'll help me on to Plattsburg to-morrow. But will he think I've done this for effect? Won't he think I'm actually throwing myself at his head? No, I can't turn back. I'd rather die than go back to that house. It won't matter what he thinks; I'll be away from all of it to-morrow. I'll be out of his life and I won't care what he thinks. England! Goodness, what's that?" She had turned a bend in the drive and just ahead there was a light. A sigh of relief followed the question. It came from the lantern which hung to a stake in the road where the new stone gate-posts were being built by workmen from town. Bazelhurst Villa was a quarter of a mile, through the park, behind her; the forest was ahead.

At the gate she stopped between the half-finished stone posts and looked ahead with the first shiver of dismay. Her limbs seemed ready to collapse. The flush of anger and excitement left her face; a white, desolate look came in its stead. Her eyes grew wide and she blinked her lashes with an awed uncertainty that boded ill for the stability of her adventure. An owl hooted in mournful cadence close by and she felt that her hair was going straight on end. The tense fingers of one hand gripped the handle of the travelling-bag while the other went spasmodically to her heart.

"Oh!" she gasped, moving over quickly to the stake on which the lantern hung. The wind was rushing through the tree-tops with increased fervor; the air was cool and wet with the signs of rain; a swirl of dust flew up into her face; the swish of leaves sounded like the splashing of water in the air. Holding her heart for minutes, she at last regained some of the lost composure. A hysterical laugh fell from her lips. "What a goose! It was an owl and I've heard hundreds of them up here. Still, they *do* sound different outside of one's own room. It's going to rain. What wretched luck! Dear me, I can't stand here all night. How black it is ahead there. Oooh! Really, now, it does seem a bit terrifying. If I only had a lantern it wouldn't be so—" her gaze fell upon the laborers' lantern that clattered aimlessly, uselessly against the stake. An instant later she had jerked it from its fastening with a cry of joy. "I'll send it back when they go for my trunks. What luck!"

Without a second's hesitation she started off briskly into the woodland road, striding along with the splendid swing of the healthy Englishwoman who has not been trained to dawdle. Her walking-skirt gave free play to her limbs; she was far past the well-known "line in the road" before she paused to take a full breath and to recapitulate. Her heart beat faster and the sudden glow in her cheek was not from the exercise. Somehow, out there alone in the world, the most amazing feeling of tenderness sped on ahead to Randolph Shaw. She tried to put it from her, but it grew and grew. Then she blushed deep within herself and her eyes grew sweet with the memory of those stolen, reprehensible hours along the frontier. Something within her breast cried out for those shining, gone-by moments, something seemed to close down on her throat, something flooded her eyes with a softness that rolled up from her entire being. Their line! Their insurmountable barrier! An absurd yet ineffable longing to fall down and kiss that line came over her with compelling force.

Her head grew light with the thought of those moments when their horses stood with muzzles together as if kissing by proxy—the flush grew deeper, though her blood went cold and she trembled.

A pitiful confusion seized her, an inexplicable timidity crept into her heart, replacing the bold assurance that had been recklessly carrying her on to him. It was as though some one had whispered the truth into her ear and she was beginning to believe.

From that moment her courage began to fail. The glow from her lantern was a menace instead of a help. A sweet timorousness enveloped her and something tingled—she knew not what.

Spattering raindrops whizzed in her face, ominous forerunners from the inky sky. The wind was whistling with shrill glee in the tree-tops and the tree-tops tried to flee before it. A mile and a half lay between her and the big cottage on the hillside—the most arduous part of the journey by far. She walked and ran as though pursued, scudding over the road with a swiftness that would have amazed another, but which seemed the essence of slowness to her. Thoughts of robbers, tramps, wild beasts, assailed her with intermittent terrors, but all served to diminish the feeling of shyness that had been interfering with her determination.

Past Renwood's cottage she sped, shuddering as she recognized the stone steps and path that ran up the hillside to the haunted house. Ghosts, witches, hobgoblins fell into the procession of pursuers, cheered on by the shrieking wind that grew more noisome as her feet carried her higher up the mountain. Now she was on new ground. She had never before explored so far as this. The hill was steep and the road had black abysses out beyond its edges. . . .

She was breathless, half dead from fatigue and terror when at last her feet stumbled up the broad steps leading to his porch. Trembling, she sank into the rustic bench that stood against the wall. The lantern clattered to her feet, and the bag with her jewels, her letter of credit, and her curling irons slid to the floor behind the bench. Here was his home! What cared she for the storm?

Even as she lay there gasping for breath, her eyes on the shadowy moon that was breaking its way through the clouds, three men raced from the stables at Bazelhurst Villa bent on finding the mad young person who had fled the place. Scarcely knowing what direction he took, Lord Bazelhurst led the way, followed by the duke and the count, all of them supplied with carriage lamps, which, at any other time, would have been sickening in their obtrusiveness. Except for Lady Evelyn, the rest of the house slept the sleep of ease.

Gradually Penelope recovered from the effects of the mad race up the hill. The sputtering flame in the lantern called her into action. Clutching it from the floor of the porch, she softly began a tour of inspection, first looking at her watch to find that it was the unholy hour of two! Had some one yelled boo! she would have swooned, so tense was every nerve. Now that she was here, what was she to do? Her heart came to her mouth, her hand shook, but not with fear; a nervous smile tried to wreak disaster to the concern in her eyes.

The house was dark and still. No one was stirring. The porch was littered with rugs and cushions, while on a small table near the end stood a decanter, a siphon, and two glasses. Two? He had said he was alone except for the housekeeper and the servants. A visitor, then. This was not what she had expected. Her heart sank. It would be hard to face the master of the house, but—a stranger? Cigarette stubs met her bewildered, troubled gaze—many of them. Deduction was easy out there in the lonely night. It was easy to see that Shaw and his companion sat up so late that the servants had gone to bed.

Distractedly she looked about for means of shelter on the porch until daylight could abet her in the flight to the village beyond. The storm was sure to come at no far distant time. She knew and feared the violence of the mountain rains.

"By all that's holy," came in a man's voice, low-toned and uncertain; "it *isn't* a dream, after all!"

She turned like a flash, with a startled exclamation and an instinctive movement as if to shield herself from unbidden gaze. Her lips parted and her heart pounded like a hammer. Standing in the doorway was Randolph Shaw, his figure looming up like a monstrous, wavering genie in the uncertain light from the shaking lantern. His right hand was to his brow and his eyes were wide with incredulous joy. She noticed that the left sleeve of his dinner jacket hung limp, and that the arm was in a white sling beneath.

"Is it really you?" he cried, his hand going instinctively to his watch-pocket as if doubting that it was night instead of morning.

"I've—I've run away from them," she stammered. "It's two o'clock—don't look! Oh, I'm so sorry now—why did I—"

"You ran away?" he exclaimed, coming toward her. "Oh, it can't be a dream. You are there, aren't you?" She was a pitiable object as she stood there, powerless to retreat, shaking like a leaf. He took her by the shoulder. "Yes—it is *you*. Good Lord, what does it mean? What has happened? How did you come here? Are you alone?"

"Utterly, miserably alone. Oh, Mr. Shaw!" she cried despairingly. "You *will* understand, won't you?"

"Never! Never as long as I live. It is beyond comprehension. The wonderful part of it all is that I was sitting in there dreaming of you—yes, I was. I heard some one out here, investigated and found you—*you,* of all people in the world. And I was dreaming that I held you in my arms. Yes, I was! I was dreaming it—"

"Mr. Shaw! You shouldn't—"

"And I awoke to find you—not in my arms, not in Bazelhurst Villa, but here—here on my porch."

"Like a thief in the night," she murmured. "What *do* you think of me?"

"Shall I tell you—really?" he cried. The light in his eyes drove her back a step or two, panic in her heart.

"N—no, no—not now!" she gasped, but a great wave of exaltation swept through her being. He turned and walked away, too dazed to speak. Without knowing it, she followed with hesitating steps. At the edge of the porch he paused and looked into the darkness.

"By Jove, I *must* be dreaming," she heard him mutter.

"No, you are not," she declared desperately. "I *am* here. I ask your protection for the night. I am going away—to England—to-morrow. I couldn't stay there—I just couldn't. I'm sorry I came here—I'm—"

"Thank haven, you *did* come," he exclaimed, turning to her joyously. "You are like a fairy—the fairy princess come true. It's unbelievable! But—but what was it you said about England?" he concluded, suddenly sober.

"I am go—going home. There's no place else. I can't live with her," she said, a bit tremulously.

"To England? At once? Your father—will he—"

"My father? I have no father. Oh!" with a sudden start. Her eyes met his in a helpless stare. "I never thought. My home was at Bazelhurst Castle—their home. I can't go there. Good heavens, what am I to do?"

A long time afterward she recalled his exultant exclamation, checked at its outset—recalled it with a perfect sense of understanding. With rare good taste he subdued whatever it was that might have struggled for expression and simply extended his right hand to relieve her of the lantern.

"We never have been enemies, Miss Drake," he said, controlling his voice admirably. "But had we been so up to this very instant, I am sure I'd surrender now. I don't know what has happened at the Villa. It doesn't matter. You are here to ask my protection and my help. I am at your service, my home is yours, my right hand also. You are tired and wet and—nervous. Won't you come inside? I'll get a light in a jiffy and Mrs. Ulrich, my housekeeper, shall be with you as soon as I can rout her out. Come in, please." She held back doubtfully, a troubled, uncertain look in her eyes.

"You *will* understand, won't you?" she asked simply.

"And no questions asked," he said from the doorway. Still she held back, her gaze going involuntarily to the glasses on the table. He interpreted the look of inquiry. "There were two of us. The doctor was here picking out the shot, that's all. He's gone. It's all right. Wait here and I'll get a light." The flame in her lantern suddenly ended its feeble life.

She stood inside his doorway and heard him shuffle across the floor in search of the lamps.

"Dark as Egypt, eh?" he called out from the opposite side of the room.

"Not as dark as the forest, Mr. Shaw."

"Good heavens, what a time you must have had. All alone, were you?"

"Of course. I was not eloping."

"I beg your pardon."

"Where were you sitting when I came up?"

"Here—in the dark. I was waiting for the storm to come and dozed away, I daresay. I love a storm, don't you?"

"Yes, if I'm indoors. Ah!" He had struck a match and was lighting the wick of a lamp beside the huge fireplace. "I suppose you think I'm perfectly crazy. I'm horrid."

"Not at all. Sit down here on the couch, please. More cheerful, eh? Good Lord, listen to the wind. You got here just in time. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll have Mrs. Ulrich down in a minute. She'll take good care of you. And I'll make you a nice hot drink, too. You need it." In the door of the big living-room he turned to her, a look of extreme doubt in his eyes. "By Jove, I bet I *do* wake up. It can't be true." She laughed plaintively and shook her head in humble self-abasement. "Don't be lonesome. I'll be back in a minute."

"Don't hurry," she murmured apologetically. Then she settled back limply in the wide couch and inspected the room, his footsteps noisily clattering down the long hallway to the left. She saw, with some misgiving, that it was purely a man's habitation. Shaw doubtless had built and furnished the big cottage without woman as a consideration. The room was large, comfortable, solid; there was not a suggestion of femininity in it—high or low—except the general air of cleanliness. The furniture was rough-hewn and built for use, not ornamentation; the walls were hung with English prints, antlers, mementoes of the hunt and the field of sport; the floor was covered with skins and great "carpet rag" rugs. The whole aspect was so distinctly mannish that her heart fluttered ridiculously in its loneliness. Her cogitations were running seriously toward riot when he came hurriedly down the hall and into her presence.

"She'll be down presently. In fact, so will the cook and the housemaid. Gad, Miss Drake, they were so afraid of the storm that all of them piled into Mrs. Ulrich's room. I wonder at your courage in facing the symptoms outdoors. Now, I'll fix you a drink. Take off your hat—be comfortable. Cigarette? Good! Here's my sideboard. See? It's a nuisance, this having only one arm in commission; affects my style as a barkeep. Don't stir; I'll be able—"

"Let me help you. I mean, please don't go to so much trouble. Really I want nothing but a place to sleep to-night. This couch will do—honestly. And some one to call me at daybreak, so that I may be on my way." He looked at her and laughed quizzically. "Oh, I'm in earnest, Mr. Shaw. I wouldn't have stopped here if it hadn't been for the storm."

"Come, now, Miss Drake, you spoil the fairy tale. You *did* intend to come here. It was the only place for you to go—and I'm glad of it. My only regret is that the house isn't filled with chaperons."

"Why?" she demanded with a guilty start.

"Because I could then say to you all the things that are in my heart—aye, that are almost bursting from my lips. I—I can't say them now, you know," he said, and she understood his delicacy. For some minutes she sat in silence watching him as he clumsily mixed the drinks and put the water over the alcohol blaze. Suddenly he turned to her with something like alarm in his voice. "By George, you don't suppose they'll pursue you?"

"Oh, wouldn't that be jolly? It would be like the real story-book—the fairy and the ogres and all that. But," dubiously, "I'm sorely afraid they consider me rubbish. Still—" looking up encouragingly—"my brother would try to find me if he—if he knew that I was gone."

To her surprise, he whistled softly and permitted a frown of anxiety to creep over his face. "I hadn't thought of that," he observed reflectively. Then he seemed to throw off the momentary symptoms of uneasiness, adding, with a laugh: "I daresay nothing will happen. The storm would put a stop to all idea of pursuit."

"Let them pursue," she said, a stubborn light in her eyes. "I am my own mistress, Mr. Shaw. They can't take me, willy nilly, as if I were a child, you know."

"That's quite true. You don't understand," he said slowly, his back to her.

"You mean the law? Is it different from ours?"

"Not that. The—er—situation. You see, they might think it a trifle odd if they found you here—with me. Don't you understand?" He turned to her with a very serious expression. She started and sat bolt upright to stare at him comprehensively.

"You mean—it—it isn't quite—er—"

"Regular, perhaps," he supplied "Please keep your seat! I'm not the censor; I'm not even an opinion. Believe me, Miss Drake, my only thought was and is for your good."

"I see. They would believe evil of me if they knew I had come to you," she mused, turning quite cold.

"I know the kind of people your sister-in-law has at her place, Miss Drake. Their sort can see but one motive in anything. You know them, too, I daresay."

"Yes, I know them," she said uneasily. "Good heavens, what a fool I've been," she added, starting to her feet. "I might have known they'll say all sorts of terrible things. They must not find me here. Mr. Shaw, I'm—I am so ashamed—I wonder what you are thinking of me." Her lip trembled and there was such a pleading look in her dark eyes that he controlled himself with difficulty. It was only by imposing the severest restraint upon his susceptibilities that he was able to approach her calmly.

"I can't tell you now—not here—what I am thinking. It isn't the place. Maybe—maybe you can read my thought, Penel—Miss Drake. Look up, please. Can't you read—oh, there now—I beg your pardon! You come to me for protection and I—well, don't be too hard on me just yet. I'll find the time and place to tell you." He drew away almost as his hand was ready to clasp hers—all because her sweet eyes met his trustingly—he could have sworn—lovingly.

"Just now I am a poor little reprobate," she sighed ever so miserably. "You are very good. I'll not forget."

"I'll not permit you to forget," he said eagerly.

"Isn't the housekeeper a long time in coming?" she asked quickly. He laughed contentedly.

"We've no reason to worry about her. It's the pursuers from Bazelhurst that should trouble us. Won't you tell me the whole story?" And she told him everything, sitting there beside him with a hot drink in her hand and a growing shame in her heart. It was dawning upon her with alarming force that she was exposing a hitherto unknown incentive. It was not a comfortable awakening. "And you champion me to that extent?" he cried joyously. She nodded bravely and went on.

"So here I am," she said in conclusion. "I really could not have walked to Ridgely to-night, could I?"

"I should say not."

"And there was really nowhere else to come but here?" dubiously.

"See that light over there—up the mountain?" he asked, leading her to a window. "Old man Grimes and his wife live up there. They keep a light burning all night to scare Renwood's ghost away. By Jove, the storm will be upon us in a minute. I thought it had blown around us." The roll of thunder came up the valley. "Thank heaven, you're safe indoors. Let them pursue if they like. I'll hide you if they come, and the servants are close-mouthed."

"I don't like the way you put it, Mr. Shaw."

"Hullo, hullo—the house," came a shout from the wind-ridden night outside. Two hearts inside stopped beating for a second or two. She caught her breath sharply as she clasped his arm.

"They are after me!" she gasped.

"They must not find you here. Really, Miss Drake, I mean it. They wouldn't understand. Come with me. Go down this hall quickly. It leads to the garden back of the house. There's a gun-room at the end of the hall. Go in there, to your right. Here, take this! It's an electric saddle-lantern. I'll head these fellows off. They shan't find you. Don't be alarmed."

She sped down the narrow hall and he, taking time to slip into a long dressing-coat, stepped out upon the porch in response to the now prolonged and impatient shouts.

"Who's there?" he shouted. The light from the windows revealed several horsemen in the roadway.

"Friends," came back through the wind. "Let us in out of the storm. It's a terror."

"I don't know you." There was a shout of laughter and some profanity.

"Oh, yes, you do, Mr. Shaw. Open up and let us in. It's Dave Rank and Ed Hunter. We can't make the cabin before the rain." Shaw could see their faces now and then by the flashes of lightning and he recognized the two woodsmen, who doubtless had been visiting sweethearts up toward Ridgely.

"Take your horses to the stable, boys, and come in," he called, laughing heartily. Then he hurried off to the gun-room. He passed Mrs. Ulrich coming downstairs yawning prodigiously; he called to her to wait for him in the library.

There was no one in the gun-room; the door leading to the back porch was open. With an exclamation he leaped outside and looked about him.

"Good heavens!" he cried, staggering back.

Far off in the night, a hundred yards or more up the road, leading to Grimes' cabin he saw the wobbling, uncertain flicker of a light wending its way like a will-o'-the-wisp through the night. Without a moment's hesitation and with something strangely like an oath, he rushed into the house, almost upsetting the housekeeper in his haste.

"Visitors outside. Make 'em comfortable. Back soon," he jerked out as he changed his coat with small respect for his injured arm. Then he clutched a couple of rain-coats from the rack and flew out of the back door like a man suddenly gone mad.

COWARDICE COURT

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH A GHOST TRESPASSES

The impulse which drove Penelope out for the second time that night may be readily appreciated. Its foundation was fear; its subordinate emotions were shame, self-pity and consciousness of her real feeling toward the man of the house. The true spirit of womanhood revolted with its usual waywardness.

She was flying down the stony road, some distance from the cottage, in the very face of the coming tornado, her heart beating like a trip-hammer, her eyes bent on the little light up the mountain-side, before it occurred to her that this last flight was not only senseless but perilous. She even laughed at herself for a fool as she recalled the tell-tale handbag on the porch and the damning presence of a Bazelhurst lantern in the hallway.

The storm which had been raging farther down the valley was at last whirling up to the hill-tops, long delayed as if in gleeful anticipation of catching her alone and unprotected. The little electric saddle-lamp that she carried gave out a feeble glow, scarce opening the way in the darkness more than ten feet ahead. Rough and irksome was the road, most stubborn the wall of wind. The second threat of the storm was more terrifying than the first; at any instant it was likely to break forth in all its slashing fury—and she knew not whither she went.

Even as she lost heart and was ready to turn wildly back in an effort to reach Shaw's home before the deluge, the lightning flashes revealed to her the presence of a dwelling just off the road not two hundred feet ahead. She stumbled forward, crying like a frightened child. There were no lights. The house looked dark, bleak, unfriendly. Farther up the hillside still gleamed the little light that was meant to keep Renwood's ghost from disturbing the slumbers of old man Grimes and his wife. She could not reach that light, that much she knew. Her feet were like hundredweights, her limbs almost devoid of power; Grimes' hut appeared to be a couple of miles away. With a last, breathless effort, she turned off the road and floundered through weeds and brush until she came to what proved to be the rear of the darkened house. Long, low, rangy it reached off into the shadows, chilling in its loneliness. There was no time left for her to climb the flight of steps and pound on the back door. The rain was swishing in the trees with a hiss that forbade delay.

She threw herself, panting and terror-stricken, into the cave-like opening under the porch, her knees giving way after the supreme effort. The great storm broke as she crouched far back against the wall; her hands over her ears, her eyes tightly closed. She was safe from wind and rain, but not from the sounds of that awful conflict. The lantern lay at her feet, sending its ray out into the storm with the senseless fidelity of a beacon light.

"Penelope!" came a voice through the storm, and a second later a man plunged into the recess, crashing against the wall beside her. Something told her who it was, even before he dropped beside her and threw his strong arm about her shoulders. The sound of the storm died away as she buried her face on his shoulder and shivered so mightily that he was alarmed. With her face burning, her blood tingling, she lay there and wondered if the throbbing of her heart were not about to kill her.

He was crying something into her ear—wild, incoherent words that seemed to have the power to quiet the storm. And she was responding—she knew that eager words were falling from her lips, but she never knew what they were—responding with a fervor that was overwhelming her with joy. Lips met again and again and there was no thought of the night, of the feud, the escapade, the Renwood ghost—or of aught save the two warm living human bodies that had found each other.

The storm, swerving with the capricious mountain winds, suddenly swept their refuge with sheets of water. Randolph Shaw threw the raincoats over his companion and both laughed hysterically at their plight, suddenly remembered.

"We can't stay here," he shouted.

"We can't go out into it," she cried. "Where are we?"

"Renwood's," he called back. Their position was untenable. He was drenched; the raincoats protected her as she crouched back into the most remote corner. Looking about, he discovered a small door leading to the cellar. It opened the instant he touched the latch. "Come, quick," he cried, lifting her to her feet. "In here—stoop! I have the light. This is the cellar. I'll have to break down a door leading to the upper part of the house, but that will not be difficult. Here's an axe or two. Good Lord, I'm soaked!"

"Whe—where are we going?" she gasped, as he drew her across the earthern floor.

"Upstairs. It's comfortable up there." They were at the foot of the narrow stairway. She held back.

"Never! It's the—the haunted house! I can't—Randolph."

"Pooh! Don't be afraid. I'm with you, dearest."

"I know," she gulped. "But you have only one arm. Oh, I can't!"

"It's all nonsense about ghosts. I've slept here twenty times, Penelope. People have seen my light and my shadow, that's all. I'm a pretty substantial ghost."

"Oh, dear! What a disappointment. And there are no spooks? Not even Mrs. Renwood?"

"Of course she may come back, dear, but you'd hardly expect a respectable lady spook to visit the place with me stopping here. Even ghosts have regard for conventionalities. She *couldn't*—"

"How much more respectable than I," Penelope murmured plaintively.

"Forgive me," he implored.

"I would—only you are *so* wet."

The door above was locked, but Shaw swung the axe so vigorously that any but a very strong-nerved ghost must have been frightened to death once more.

"It's my house, you know," he explained from the top step. "There we are! Come up, Penelope. The fort is yours."

She followed him into the hall above. In silence they walked along the bare floors through empty rooms until at last he opened a door in what proved to be the left wing. To her surprise, this room was comfortably furnished. There were ashes in the big fireplace and there were lamps which had been used recently—for they were filled with oil.

"Here's where I read sometimes," he explained. "I have slept on that couch. Last winter I came up here to hunt. My cottage wasn't finished, so I stayed here. I'll confess I've heard strange sounds—now, don't shiver! Once or twice I've been a bit nervous, but I'm still alive, you see." He lighted the wicks in the two big lamps while she looked on with the chills creeping up and down her back. "I'll have a bully fire in the fireplace in just a minute."

"Let me help you," she suggested, coming quite close to him with uneasy glances over her shoulders.

Ten minutes later they were sitting before a roaring fire, quite content even though there was a suggestion of amazed ghosts lurking in the hallway behind them. No doubt old man Grimes and his wife, if they awoke in the course of the night, groaned deep prayers in response to the bright light from the windows of the haunted house. Shaw and Penelope smiled securely as they listened to the howling storm outside.

"Well, this *is* trespassing," she said, beaming a happy smile upon him.

"I shall be obliged to drive you out, alas," he said reflectively. "Do you recall my vow? As long as you are a Bazelhurst, I must perforce eject you."

"Not to-night!" she cried in mock dismay.

"But, as an alternative, you'll not be a Bazelhurst long," he went on eagerly, suddenly taking her hands into his, forgetful of the wounded left. "I'm going to try trespassing myself. To-morrow I'm going to see your brother. It's regular, you know. I'm going to tell the head of your clan that you are coming over to Shaw, heart and hand."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "You—you—no, no! You must not do that!"

"But, my dear, you *are* going to marry me."

"Yes—I—suppose so," she murmured helplessly. "That isn't what I meant. I mean, it isn't necessary to ask Cecil. Ask me; I'll consent for him.

Half an hour passed. Then he went to the window and looked out into the storm.

"You *must* lie down and get some sleep," he insisted, coming back to her. "The storm's letting up, but we can't leave here for quite a while. I'll sit up and watch. I'm too happy to sleep." She protested, but her heavy eyes were his allies. Soon he sat alone before the fire; she slept sound on the broad couch in the corner, a steamer rug across her knees. A contented smile curved his lips as he gazed reflectively into the flames. He was not thinking of Mrs. Renwood's amiable ghost.

How long she had been asleep, Penelope did not know. She awoke with a start, her flesh creeping. A nameless dread came over her; she felt that she was utterly alone and surrounded by horrors. It was a full minute—a sickening hour, it seemed—before she realized that she was in the room with the man she loved. Her frightned eyes caught sight of him lying back in the chair before the dying fire in the chimney place. The lights were low, the shadows gaunt and chill.

A terrified exclamation started to her lips. Her ears again caught the sound of some one moving in the house—some alien visitor. There was no mistaking the sound—the distant, sepulchral laugh and the shuffling of feet, almost at the edge of the couch it seemed.

"Randolph!" she whispered hoarsely. The man in the chair did not move. She threw off the blanket and came to a sitting posture on the side of the couch, her fingers clutching the covering with tense horror. Again the soft, rumbling laugh and the sound of footsteps on the stairway. Like a flash she sped across the room and clutched frantically at Randolph's shoulders. He awoke with an exclamation, staring bewildered into the horrified face above.

"The—the ghost!" she gasped, her eyes glued upon the hall door. He leaped to his feet and threw his arms about her.

"You've had a bad dream," he said. "What a beast I was to fall asleep. Lord, you're frightened half out of your wits. Don't tremble so, dearest. There's no ghost. Every one knows—"

"Listen—listen!" she whispered. Together they stood motionless, almost breathless before the fire, the glow from which threw their shadows across the room to meet the mysterious invader.

"Good Lord," he muttered, unwilling to believe his ears. "There *is* some one in the house. I've—I've heard sounds here before, but not like these." Distinctly to their startled ears came the low, subdued murmur of a human voice and then unmistakable moans from the very depth of the earth —from the grave, it seemed.

"Do you hear?" she whispered. "Oh, this dreadful place! Take me away, Randolph, dear—"

"Don't be afraid," he said, drawing her close. "There's nothing supernatural about those sounds. They come from lips as much alive as ours. I'll investigate." He grabbed the heavy poker from the chimney corner, and started toward the door. She followed close behind, his assurance restoring in a measure the courage that had temporarily deserted her.

In the hallway they paused to look out over the broad porch. The storm had died away, sighing its own requiem in the misty tree-tops. Dawn was not far away. A thick fog was rising to meet the first glance of day. In surprise Shaw looked at his watch, her face at his shoulder. It was after five o'clock.

"Ghosts turn in at midnight, dear," he said with a cheerful smile. "They don't keep such hours as these."

"But who can it be? There are no tramps in the mountains," she protested, glancing over her shoulder apprehensively.

"Listen! By Jove, that voice came from the cellar."

"And the lock is broken," she exclaimed. "But how silly of me! Ghosts don't stop for locks."

"I'll drop the bolts just the same," he said, as they hurried down the hallway. At the back stairs they stopped and listened for many minutes. Not a sound came up to them from below. Softly he closed the door and lowered two heavy bars into place. "If there's any one down there they probably think they've heard spooks trotting around up here."

"Really, it's quite thrilling, isn't it?" she whispered, in her excitement.

"In any event, we're obliged to remain under cover until they depart," he said thoughtfully. "We can't be seen here, dearest."

"No," she murmured, "not even though it is *our* house."

They returned to the big room as softly as mice and he left her a moment later to close the heavy window shutters on the porch. When he returned there was a grim smile on his face and his voice shook a little as he spoke.

"I've heard the voices again. They came from the laundry, I think. The Renwoods were downright Yankees, Penelope; I will swear that these voices are amazingly English."

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH THE AUTHOR TRESPASSES

This narrative has quite as much to do with the Bazelhurst side of the controversy as it has with Shaw's. It is therefore but fair that the heroic invasion by Lord Cecil should receive equal consideration from the historian. Shaw's conquest of one member of the force opposing him was scarcely the result of bravery; on the other hand Lord Cecil's dash into the enemy's country was the very acme of intrepidity. Shaw had victory fairly thrust upon him; Lord Bazelhurst had a thousand obstacles to overcome before he could even so much as stand face to face with the enemy. Hence the expedition that started off in the wake of the deserter deserves more than passing mention.

Down the drive and out into the mountain road clattered the three horsemen. Lady Bazelhurst, watching at the window casement, almost swooned with amazement at the sight of them. The capes of their mackintoshes seemed to flaunt a satirical farewell in her face; their owners, following the light of the carriage lamps, swept from view around a bend in the road.

His lordship had met the duke in the hall, some distance from that nobleman's room, and, without observing Barminster's apparent confusion, commanded him to join in the pursuit. Barminster explained that he was going to see how the cook was resting; however, he would go much farther to be of service to the runaway sister of his host.

"She's broken-hearted," half sobbed the brother.

"Yes," agreed the duke; "and what's a broken leg to a broken heart? Penelope's heart, at that. Demme, I can't find the cook's room, anyway."

"It's in the servants' wing," said Cecil, anxious to be off.

"To be sure. Stupid ass I am. I say, old chap, here's Deveaux's door. Let's rout him out. We'll need some one to hold the horses if we have to force our way into Shaw's house."

The count was not thoroughly awake until he found himself in the saddle some time later; it is certain that he did not know until long afterward why they were riding off into the storm. He fell so far behind his companions in the run down the road that he could ask no questions. Right bravely the trio plunged into the dark territory over which the enemy ruled. It was the duke who finally brought the cavalcade to a halt by propounding a most sensible question.

"Are you sure she came this way, Cecil?"

"Certainly. This is Shaw's way, isn't it?"

"Did she say she was going to Shaw's?"

"Don't know. Evelyn told me. Hang it all, Barminster, come along. We'll never catch up to her."

"Is she riding?"

"No—horses all in."

"Do you know, we may have passed her. Deuce take it, Bazelhurst, if she's running away from us, you don't imagine she'd be such a silly fool as to stand in the road and wait for us. If she heard us she'd hide among the trees."

"But she's had an hour's start of us."

"Where ees she coming to?" asked the count, with an anxious glance upward just in time to catch a skirmishing raindrop with his eye.

"That's just it. We don't know," said the duke.

"But I must find her," cried Lord Cecil. "Think of that poor girl alone in this terrible place, storm coming up and all that. Hi, Penelope!" he shouted in his most vociferous treble. The shrieking wind replied. Then the three of them shouted her name. "Gad, she may be lost or dead or— Come on, Barminster. We must scour the whole demmed valley." They were off again, moving more cautiously while the duke threw the light from his lamp into the leafy shadows beside the roadway. The wind was blowing savagely down the slope and the raindrops were beginning to beat in their faces with ominous persistency. Some delay was caused by an accident to the rear-guard. A mighty gust of wind blew the count's hat far back over the travelled road. He was so much nearer Bazelhurst Villa when they found it that he would have kept on in that direction for the sake of his warm bed had not his companions talked so scornfully about cowardice.

"He's like a wildcat to-night," said the duke in an aside to the little Frenchman, referring to his lordship. "Demme, I'd rather not cross him. You seem to forget that his sister is out in all this fury."

"Mon Dieu, but I do not forget. I would gif half my life to hold her in my arms thees eenstan'."

"Dem you, sir, I'd give her the other half if you dared try such a thing. We didn't fetch you along to hold her. You've got to hold the horses, that's all."

"Diable! How dare you to speak to—"

"What are you two rowing about?" demanded his lordship. "Come along! We're losing time. Sit on your hat, Deveaux."

Away they swept, Penelope's two admirers wrathfully barking at one another about satisfaction at some future hour.

The storm burst upon them in all its fury—the maddest, wildest storm they had known in all their lives. Terrified, half drowned, blown almost from the saddles, the trio finally found shelter in the lee of a shelving cliff just off the road. While they stood there shivering, clutching the bits of their well-nigh frantic horses, the glimmer of lights came down to them from windows farther up the steep. There was no mistaking the three upright oblongs of light; they were tall windows in the house, the occupants of which doubtless had been aroused at this unearthly hour by the fierceness of the storm.

"By Jove," lamented the duke, water running down his neck in floods. "What a luxury a home is, be it ever so humble, on a night like this."

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" groaned the count. "How comfortab' zey look. And here? *Eh bien! Qui fait trembler la terre!* I am seeck! I die!"

"Penelope is out in all this," moaned his lordship.

"I am not so sure of that. Trust a woman to find a place where she can't ruin her hat. My word for it, Cecil, she's found a safe roost. I say, by Jove!" The duke was staring more intently than ever at the windows far above. "I have it! Isn't it rather odd that a house should be lighted so brilliantly at this hour of night?"

"Demmed servants forgot to put out the lamps," groaned Bazelhurst without interest.

"Nonsense! I tell you what: some one has roused the house and asked shelter from the storm. Now, who could that be but Penelope?"

"By Jove, you're a ripping clever ass, after all, Barminster—a regular Sherlock Holmes. That's just it! She's up there where the windows are. Come on! It's easy sailing now," cried his lordship, but the duke restrained him.

"Don't rush off like a fool. Whose house is it?"

"How the devil do I know? This is Shaw's land, and he hasn't been especially cordial about—"

"Aha! See what I mean? Shaw's land, to be sure. Well, hang your stupidity, don't you know we're looking at Shaw's house this very instant? He lives there and she's arrived, dem it all. She's up there with him—dry clothes, hot drinks and all that, and we're out here catching pneumonia. Fine, isn't it?"

"Gad! You're right! She's with that confounded villain. My God, what's to become of her?" groaned Lord Cecil, sitting down suddenly and covering his face with his hands.

"We must rescue her!" shouted the duke. "Brace up, Cecil. Don't be a baby. We'll storm the place."

"Not in zis rain!" cried the count.

"You stay here in the shade and hold the horses, that's what you do," said the duke scornfully.

A council of war was held. From their partially sheltered position the invaders could see, by the flashes of lightning, that a path and some steps ascended the hill. The duke was for storming the house at once, but Lord Cecil argued that it would be foolish to start before the storm abated. Moreover, he explained, it would be the height of folly to attack the house until they were sure that Penelope was on the inside.

After many minutes there came a break in the violence of the storm and preparations were at once made for the climb up the hill. Deveaux was to remain behind in charge of the horses. With their bridle reins in his hands he cheerfully maintained this position of trust, securely sheltered from the full force of the elements. Right bravely did the duke and his lordship venture forth into the spattering rain. They had gone no more than three rods up the path when they were brought to a halt by the sounds of a prodigious struggle behind them. There was a great trampling of horses' hoofs, accompanied by the frantic shouts of the count.

"I cannot hold zem! Mon Dieu! Zey are mad! Ho! Ho! Help!"

He was in truth having a monstrous unpleasant time. His two friends stumbled to his assistance, but not in time to prevent the catastrophe. The three horses had taken it into their heads to bolt for home; they were plunging and pulling in three directions at the same time, the count manfully clinging to the bridle reins, in great danger of being suddenly and shockingly dismembered.

"Hold to 'em!" shouted Lord Cecil.

"Help!" shouted the count, at the same moment releasing his grip on the reins. Away tore the horses, kicking great chunks of mud over him as he tumbled aimlessly into the underbrush. Down the road clattered the animals, leaving the trio marooned in the wilderness. Groaning and half dead, the unfortunate count was dragged from the brush by his furious companions. What the duke said to him was sufficient without being repeated, here or elsewhere. The count challenged him as they all resumed the march up the hill to visit the house with the lighted windows.

"Here is my card, m'sieur," he grated furiously.

"Demme, I know you!" roared the duke. "Keep your card and we'll send it in to announce our arrival to Shaw."

In due course of time, after many slips and falls, they reached the front yard of the house on the hillside. It was still raining lightly; the thunder and lightning were clashing away noisily farther up the valley. Cautiously they approached through the weeds and brush.

"By Jove!" exclaimed his lordship, coming to a standstill. He turned the light of his lantern toward the front elevation of the house. "Every door and window, except these three, are boarded up. It can't be Shaw's home."

"That's right, old chap. Deuced queer, eh? I say, Deveaux, step up and pound on the door. You've got a card, you know."

"Que diable!" exclaimed the count, sinking into the background.

"We might reconnoitre a bit," said Bazelhurst. "Have a look at the rear, you know."

Around the corner of the house they trailed, finally bringing up at the back steps. The windows were not only dark but boarded up. While they stood there amazed and uncertain, the rain came down again in torrents, worse than before if possible. They scampered for cover, plunging three abreast beneath the same steps that had sheltered Penelope and Shaw such a short time before.

"Ouch! Get off my foot!" roared the duke.

"Zounds! Who are you punching, demme! Hullo! What's this? A door and open, as I live." The trio entered the cellar door without ceremony. "Thank God, we're out of the rain, at least."

It was not until they had explored the basement and found it utterly without signs of human occupancy that the truth of the situation began to dawn upon them. Barminster's face was white and his voice shook as he ventured the horrid speculation:

"The good Lord save us—it's that demmed haunted house Pen was talking about!"

"But ze lights?" queried the count.

"Ghosts!"

"Let's get out of this place," said Lord Bazelhurst, moving toward the door. "It's that beastly Renwood house. They say he comes back and murders her every night or so."

"Mon Dieu!"

"Penelope isn't here. Let's move on," agreed the duke readily. But even fear of the supernatural was not strong enough to drive them out into the blinding storm. "I say! Look ahead there. By Harry, *there's* Shaw's place."

Peering through the door they saw for the first time the many lights in Shaw's windows, scarce a quarter of a mile away. For a long time they stood and gazed at the distant windows. Dejectedly they sat down, backs to the wall, and waited for the storm to spend its fury. Wet, cold, and tired, they finally dozed. It was Lord Cecil who first saw the signs of dawn. The rain storm had come to a mysterious end, but a heavy fog in its stead loomed up. He aroused his companions and with many groans of anguish they prepared to venture forth into the white wall beyond.

Just as they were taking a last look about the wretched cellar something happened that would have brought terror to the stoutest heart. A wild, appalling shriek came from somewhere above, the cry of a mortal soul in agony.

The next instant three human forms shot through the narrow door and out into the fog, hair on end, eyes bulging but sightless, legs traveling like the wind and as purposeless. It mattered not that the way was hidden; it mattered less that weeds, brush, and stumps lurked in ambush for unwary feet. They fled into the foggy dangers without a thought of what lay before them—only of what stalked behind them.

Upstairs Randolph Shaw lay back against the wall and shook with laughter. Penelope's convulsed face was glued to the kitchen window, her eyes peering into the fog beyond. Shadowy figures leaped into the white mantle; the crash of brush came back to her ears, and then, like the barking of a dog, there arose from the mystic gray the fast diminishing cry:

"Help! Help! Help!" Growing fainter and sharper the cry at last was lost in the phantom desert.

They stood at the window and watched the fog lift, gray and forbidding, until the trees and road were discernible. Then, arm in arm, they set forth across the wet way toward Shaw's cottage. The mists cleared as they walked along, the sun peeped through the hills as if afraid to look upon the devastation of the night; all the world seemed at peace once more.

"Poor Cecil!" she sighed. "It was cruel of you." In the roadway they found a hat which she at once identified as the count's. Farther on there was a carriage lamp, and later a mackintosh which had been cast aside as an impediment. "Oh, it *was* cruel!" She smiled, however, in retrospection.

An hour later they stood together on the broad porch, looking out over the green, glistening hills. The warm fresh air filled their lungs and happiness was overcrowding their hearts. In every direction were signs of the storm's fury. Great trees lay blasted, limbs and branches were scattered over the ground, wide fissures split the roadway across which the deluge had rushed on its way down the slope.

But Penelope was warm and dry and safe after her thrilling night. A hot breakfast was being prepared for them; trouble seemed to have gone its way with the elements.

"If I were only sure that nothing serious had happened to Cecil," she murmured anxiously.

"I'm sorry, dear, for that screech of mine, he apologized.

Suddenly he started and gazed intently in the direction of the haunted house. A man—a sorry figure—was slowly, painfully approaching from the edge of the wood scarce a hundred yards away. In his hand he carried a stick to which was attached a white cloth—doubtless a handkerchief. He was hatless and limped perceptibly. The two on the porch watched his approach in amazed silence.

"It's Cecil!" whispered Penelope in horror-struck tones. "Good heaven, Randolph, go to him! He is hurt."

It was Lord Bazelhurst. As Shaw hurried down the drive to meet him, no thought of the feud in mind, two beings even more hopelessly dilapidated ventured from the wood and hobbled up behind the truce-bearer, who had now paused to lift his shoulders into a position of dignity and defiance. Shaw's heart was touched. The spectacle was enough to melt the prejudice of any adversary. Lord Cecil's knees trembled; his hand shook as if in a chill. Mud-covered, water-soaked, and bruised, their clothes rent in many places, their hats gone and their hair matted, their legs wobbly, the trio certainly inspired pity, not mirth nor scorn.

"One moment, sir," called his lordship, with a feeble attempt at severity. His voice was hoarse and shaky. "We do not come as friends, dem you. Is my sister here?"

"She is, Lord Bazelhurst. We'll talk this over later on," said Shaw in his friendliest way. "You are worn out and done up, I'm sure—you and your friends. Come! I'm not as bad as you think. I've changed my mind since I saw you last. Let's see if we can't come to an amicable understanding. Miss Drake is waiting up there. Breakfast soon will be ready—hot coffee and all that. Permit me, gentlemen, to invite you to partake of what we have. What say you?"

"Confound you, sir, I—I—" but his brave effort failed him. He staggered and would have fallen had not the duke caught him from behind.

"Thanks, old chap," said Barminster to Shaw. "We will come in for a moment. I say, perhaps you could give us a dry dud or two. Bazelhurst is in a bad way and so is the count. It was a devil of a storm."

"Mon Dieu! c'était épouvantable!" groaned the count.

Penelope came down from the porch to meet them. Without a word she took her brother's arm. He stared at her with growing resentment.

"Dem it all, Pen," he chattered, "you're not at all wet, are you? Look at me! All on your account, too."

"Dear old Cecil! All on Evelyn's account, you mean," she said softly, wistfully.

"I shall have an understanding with her when we get home," he said earnestly. "She sha'n't treat my sister like this again."

"No," said Shaw from the other side; "she sha'n't."

"By Jove, Shaw, are you *with* me?" demanded his lordship in surprise.

"Depends on whether you are with me," said the other. Penelope flushed warmly.

Later on, three chastened but ludicrous objects shuffled into the breakfast-room, where Shaw and Penelope awaited them. In passing, it is only necessary to say that Randolph Shaw's clothes did not fit the gentlemen to whom they were loaned. Bazelhurst was utterly lost in the folds of a gray tweed, while the count was obliged to roll up the sleeves and legs of a frock suit which fitted Shaw rather too snugly. The duke, larger than the others, was passably fair in an old swallow-tail coat and brown trousers. They were clean, but there was a strong odor of arnica about them. Each wore, besides, an uncertain, sheepish smile.

Hot coffee, chops, griddle cakes, and maple syrup soon put the contending forces at their ease. Bazelhurst so far forgot himself as to laugh amiably at his host's jokes. The count responded in his most piquant dialect, and the duke swore by an ever-useful Lord Harry that he had never tasted such a breakfast.

"By Jove, Pen," exclaimed her brother, in rare good humor, "it's almost a sin to take you away from such good cooking as this."

"You're not going to take her away, however," said Shaw. "She has come to stay."

There was a stony silence. Coffee-cups hung suspended in the journey to mouths, and three pairs of eyes stared blankly at the smiling speaker.

"What—what the devil do you mean, sir?" demanded Lord Cecil, his coffee-cup shaking so violently that the contents overflowed.

"She's going over to Plattsburg with me to-day, and when she comes back she will be Mrs. Randolph Shaw. That's what I mean, your lordship."

Three of his listeners choked with amazement and then coughed painfully. Feebly they set their cups down and gulped as if they had something to swallow. The duke was the first to find his tongue, and he was quite at a loss for words.

"B—by Jove," he said blankly, "that's demmed hot coffee!"

"Is this true, Penelope?" gasped his lordship.

"Yes, Cecil. I've promised to marry him."

"Good God! It isn't because you feel that you have no home with me?"

"I love him. It's a much older story than you think," she said simply.

"I say, that hits me hard," said the duke, with a wry face. "Still, I join in saying God bless you."

"We're trying to end the feud, you see," said Penelope.

Tears came into his lordship's pale eyes. He looked first at one and then at the other, and then silently extended his hand to Randolph Shaw. He wrung it vigorously for a long time before speaking. Then, as if throwing a weight off his mind, he remarked:

"I say, Shaw, I'm sorry about that dog. I've got an English bull-terrier down there that's taken a ribbon or so. If you don't mind, I'll send him up to you. He—he knows Penelope."

The Case of Mrs. Magnus

BY BURTON E. STEVENSON

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CHAPTER I

THE position of confidential family adviser is not without its drawbacks, and it was with a certain reluctance that I told the office boy to show Mrs. Magnus in. For Mrs. Magnus was that *bête noire* of the lawyer—a woman recently widowed, utterly without business experience, and yet with a firm belief in her ability to manage her husband's estate. If Mrs. Magnus chose to ruin herself there was, of course, no reason why I should worry, but it is annoying to have a person constantly asking for advice and as constantly disregarding it. I never really understood why Mrs. Magnus asked for advice at all.

She was a woman of about fifty, thin and nervous, with a curious habit of compressing her lips into a tight knot, under the impression, I suppose, that the result indicated strength of character. Peter Magnus had married her when he was only an obscure clerk in the great commission house which he was afterward to own, and she was a school teacher or governess, or something of that sort. Perhaps she was a little ahead of him intellectually at the start, but he had broadened and developed, while she had narrowed and dried up, but she never lost the illusion of her mental supremacy, nor the idea that she had, in some dim way, married beneath her.

There were no children, and for the past ten years the old Magnus house on Twenty-third Street had been for her a kind of hermitage from which she seldom issued. Great business blocks sprang up on either side of it, but she would never permit her husband to sell it and move farther uptown.

For Magnus, on the other hand, the house became in time merely a sort of way station between the busy terminals of his life. I dare say he grew indifferent to his wife. That, however, has nothing to do with this story.

Mrs. Magnus usually entered my office as one intrenched in conscious strength, but this morning it was evident that something had occurred to disturb her calm assurance. Her lips seemed more shrunken than ever; there were little lines of worry about her eyes, and dark circles under them, and as she dropped into the chair I placed for her, I saw that her hands were trembling. As I sat down in my own chair and swung around to face her, the conviction struck through me that she was badly frightened.

"Mr. Lester," she began, after a moment in which she was visibly struggling for self-control, "I want fifty thousand dollars in currency."

"Why—why, of course," I stammered, trying to accept the demand as quite an ordinary one. "When?"

"By eight o'clock to-night."

"Very well," I said. "But I suppose you know that, to secure the money so quickly, some of your securities will have to be sacrificed. It's a bear market."

"I don't care—sacrifice them. Only I must have that sum to-night."

"Very well," I said again. "But I hope you will tell me, if you can, what the money is for, Mrs. Magnus. Perhaps my advice—"

"No, it won't," she broke in. "This isn't a case for advice. There's nothing else for me to do. I've been fighting it and fighting it—but—"

She ended with a little gesture of helplessness and resignation.

"Perhaps we might borrow the money," I suggested, "until a better market—"

"No," she broke in again, "you know I won't borrow. So don't talk about it."

It was one of the fundamental tenets of this woman's financial creed that on no account was money to be borrowed.

"Very well," I said a third time; "I will get the money. I will look over the market and decide how it would best be done. Have you any suggestions to make?"

"No," she answered; "I leave it all to you."

This was almost more astonishing than the demand for the money had been. Mrs. Magnus was clearly upset.

"I shall probably have to send some papers up to you this afternoon for your signature," I added.

"I shall be at home. And remember I must have the money without fail."

"I will bring it to you myself. I think you said eight o'clock?"

"Yes—not later than that."

"I will have it there by that time," I assured her.

She started to rise, then sank back in her chair and looked at me. Yes, she was frightened.

"Mr. Lester," she said, her voice suddenly hoarse and broken, "I think I will tell you—what I can. I—I have no one else."

For the first time in my life I found myself pitying her. It was true—she had no one else.

"Don't think that I've been gambling or speculating or anything of that sort," she went on. "I have hesitated a long time before asking for this money—I don't enjoy giving away fifty thousand dollars."

"Giving it away?" I repeated. Certainly she was not the woman to enjoy doing that!

"Yes—giving it away! But—I must have peace! Another such night as last night—"

A sudden pallor spread across her face, and she touched her handkerchief hastily to lips and eyes.

"My—my husband wishes it," she added, almost in a whisper.

I don't know what there was about that sentence that sent a little shiver along my spine. Perhaps it was the tense of the verb. Perhaps it was the voice in which the words were uttered. Perhaps it was the haggard glance which accompanied them. Whatever the cause, I found that some of my client's panic was communicating itself to me.

"You mean he indicated his wish before he died?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"Or left a note of it, perhaps?"

"Yes," she said, "he has left a note of it," and she opened the bag she carried on her arm. "Here it is."

I took the sheet of paper she held out to me. It bore these words, written in the crabbed and somewhat uncertain hand which had belonged to Peter Magnus:

My Dear Wife: It is my wish that you leave at once on this desk the sum of fifty thousand dollars in currency.

"On this desk?" I repeated, reading the words over again.

"On his desk at home," she explained.

"Then what is to become of it?"

"I don't know."

"But surely—" I said, bewildered. "Look here, Mrs. Magnus, you aren't telling me everything. Where did you find this?"

"On his desk."

"When?"

"Three nights ago."

"You mean it had been lying there unnoticed ever since his death?"

"No," she answered hoarsely. "It had not been lying there unnoticed. It was written that night."

I could only stare at her—at her trembling lips, at her bloodshot eyes, at her livid face.

"Then it's an imposture of some sort," I said at last.

"It is not an imposture," she answered, more hoarsely than ever. "My husband wrote those words."

"Nonsense!" I retorted impatiently. "Somebody's trying to impose on you, Mrs. Magnus. Leave this with me, and I'll get to the bottom of it."

"I tell you," she repeated, rising to her feet in her earnestness, "my husband wrote those words three nights ago."

"How do you know he did?" I questioned, in some amusement.

"Because I saw him do it!" she answered, and fell back into her chair again, her hands fumbling feebly at her bag.

She was evidently on the verge of collapse, and I hastened to get her a glass of water, but when I returned with it, she had her smelling bottle to her nose and was almost herself again. She waved the glass away impatiently.

"I shall be all right in a moment," she murmured, and I sat down again and watched her, wondering if there had ever been any insanity in Mrs. Magnus' family.

I suppose my thought must have been reflected in my face, for Mrs. Magnus flushed angrily as she caught my eye.

"No, I'm not mad," she said "though I feared last night that I would be. What I have told you is perfectly true. I saw my husband write that note three nights ago—it is not the only one. He can have no peace until that money is paid—neither can I. You must not fail me."

"I will not," I assured her. "I will bring it to you myself."

"Thank you," she said, and arose to go. "I shall want you to be present to-night."

"I shall be glad to help you in any way I can."

"Thank you," she said again, and I opened the door for her and watched her for a moment as she crossed the outer office. Then I closed the door and went back to my desk.

The note was lying where I had dropped it, and I picked it up and examined it again. Then I got out some samples of Magnus' writing and compared them with the note, but so far as I could tell the hands were the same. Besides, she had said she had seen her husband write it.

This gave me pause. How could she have seen him? How had he appeared to her? Perhaps she had written it herself, in her sleep, under some sort of self-hypnosis—but, in that case, would the handwriting have been her husband's? Or did hypnosis involve that, too? I ended by turning to the phone and calling for 3100 Spring. That, as you may know, is for 300 Mulberry Street; and 300 Mulberry Street is the drab building in which the police system of New York has its headquarters—or did have until the other day.

"Is Jim Godfrey there?" I asked.

"I'll see; hold the line."

A moment later I heard Godfrey's voice ask: "Hello? What is it?"

"It's Lester, Godfrey," I said. "I wish you would run over to the office and see me this morning."

"All right," he replied; "I'll be over right away."

I hung up the receiver with a sigh of relief. If anybody could see through the puzzle, I knew that Godfrey could. I had met him first in connection with the Holladay case, when he had deserted the force temporarily to accept a place as star reporter on the yellowest of the dailies; but he had resigned that position in a moment of pique, and the department had promptly gobbled him up again.

Fifteen minutes later his card was brought in to me, and I had him shown in at once.

"How are you, Lester?" he said, and I can't tell you what a tonic there was in the grip of his hand. "What's wrong this morning?"

"You know Mrs. Magnus?" I asked.

"Widow of Peter? Yes; I've heard of her."

"Somebody's trying to do her out of fifty thousand dollars," I said, and tossed the note across to him. "What do you make of that?"

"Tell me about it," he said, and studied it carefully, while I repeated the story Mrs. Magnus had told me.

"And now what do you make of it?" I asked again.

"I think the answer's blackmail," he said quietly.

"But that note?"

"A fake."

"And the story?"

"Also a fake."

"You mean she didn't see him write it?"

"Look here, Lester," demanded Godfrey impatiently, "you don't mean to say that you believe any such rot?"

"No," I answered; "I don't see how I can believe it—and yet, what did she tell it for?"

"She had to tell something."

"That's just it," I objected; "she didn't."

"Well, then, she wanted to tell something to throw you off the track. That was the best thing she could think of."

"Why should she want to throw me off the track?"

"There are some women who would rather have a ghost in the family than a scandal. I don't suppose you know that Magnus had another wife living over in Jersey?"

"Another wife?"

"Oh, of course not a wife really—your Mrs. Magnus has the prior claim. But I fancy Number Two has asked to be provided for."

I sat silent for a moment, casting this over in my mind.

"It's just like a fool woman," I said at last, "to try to throw dust in the eyes of the one man who might have helped her. Heaven help a woman who won't tell the truth to her lawyer! I suppose there's nothing to do but turn over the money?"

"Of course not. Mrs. Magnus can afford it, and if it will give her peace of mind, why—"

"All right," I said. "And thank you, Godfrey, for telling me. I was imagining that either Mrs. Magnus was crazy or that some one was trying to bunco her. This is different. If she wants to lie to me, why, let her."

"You'll take it up to her yourself?"

"Yes. I promised to have it at the house at eight o'clock to-night."

I fancied that Godfrey's eyes paused on mine for the merest instant as though he was about to say something more, but he merely nodded and said good-by and was off.

And I turned to the task of deciding which of Mrs. Magnus' securities I should sell in order to get the best out of the market. But more than once in the course of the afternoon a vague uneasiness seized me. For, after all, Godfrey's explanation did not account for Mrs. Magnus' strained and frightened manner. If the story she had told me was a lie, she was certainly a consummate actress. I had never credited her with any ability in that direction.

A consummate forger, too!

The thought stung me upright. Of course, if her story was a lie, she herself had written the note. Had Godfrey thought of that? Or was it Godfrey who was trying to throw dust in my eyes?

CHAPTER II

It was raining when I left my apartment at the Marathon that night—a cold and disagreeable drizzle—and the thought occurred to me as I turned up my coat collar and stepped into the cab I had summoned, that it was a somewhat foolhardy thing to be driving about the streets of New York with fifty thousand dollars in my hand bag. I glanced at the lights of the Tenderloin police station, just across the street, and thought for an instant of going over and asking for an escort. Then I sank back into the seat with a little laugh at my own nervousness.

"One-twenty West Twenty-third," I said, as the cabman slammed the apron shut.

He nodded, spoke to his horse, and we were off.

The asphalt was gleaming with the rain, and a thin fog was in the air, which formed a nimbus around the street lamps and drew a veil before the shop windows. Far away I heard the rattle of the elevated and the never-ceasing hum of Sixth Avenue and Broadway, but, save for these reminders of the city's life, the silence of the street was broken only by the click-clack of our horse's hoofs.

We swung sharply around a corner, and then another. A moment later the cab drew up at the curb, and the driver sprang from his box.

"Here we are, sir," he said, and as I stepped to the pavement, I saw the old Magnus house frowning down upon me.

I had never before seen it at night, and for the first time I really appreciated its gloomy situation. In its day it had been part of a fashionable residential district, of which it was now the only survival. It was of brownstone, with a flight of steps mounting steeply to the door, and stood back from the street at the bottom of a cañon formed by the towering walls of the adjacent office buildings. Why any woman who could afford to live where she chose should choose to live here was a riddle past my solving.

Musing over this, I mounted the steps and rang the bell.

"I am Mr. Lester," I said, to the maid who opened the door. "Mrs. Magnus is expecting me."

She stood aside for me to enter, and as I passed I happened to glance at her face. It was that of a woman no longer young, and yet scarcely middle-aged; not a repulsive face; indeed, rather attractive in a way, except for a certain hardness of expression which told of lost illusions. And as she took my coat and hat, I noticed that the little finger of her left hand was missing.

"This way, sir," she said, and motioned me into a room at the right. "Mrs. Magnus will be down in a minute."

I heard her step recede along the hall, and then somewhere a clock struck eight. As the sound died away the rustle of skirts came down the stair, and Mrs. Magnus appeared in the doorway. Her panic of the morning had passed, and she was perfectly self-controlled.

"Ah, Mr. Lester," she said, "you are prompt. You have the money?" she added in a lower tone.

"Yes," I answered, and then stopped, for I fancied I heard a stealthy footstep at the door.

"Let us go up to the study. We will be more comfortable there," and she led the way out into the hall.

I was close at her heels, and looked quickly to right and left. But there was no one in sight.

Mrs. Magnus went before me up the stair, turned toward the front of the house in the hall above, and ushered me into a small room which seemed to have been fitted up as an office. Its principal piece of furniture was a massive, roll-top desk. The top was up at the moment, and disclosed rows of pigeonholes, some full of papers and some empty. Below them were the usual small drawers. The desk was one of the largest I have ever seen, and I wondered how it had been got into the room. An office chair of the usual swing type stood in front of it.

Something told me that this was *the* desk. It stood in one corner of the room; not closely in the corner, but at an angle to it, its back touching the wall on either side and leaving a little triangle of space behind it. The reason of this was evident enough, for, placed in this way, the person sitting at the desk got the advantage of the light from the window at his right, and also the heat from the fireplace at his left.

The thought flashed through my mind that, before I placed the money on the desk, I would take occasion to glance over into the space back of it.

"Sit down, Mr. Lester," said Mrs. Magnus, and herself drew up a chair to one side of the fireplace, where a wood fire crackled cheerily, throwing out a warmth just strong enough to be grateful on this damp evening. "The money is in that bag?"

"Yes," I said. "I have it in hundred-dollar bills—five packets of one hundred each. I thought perhaps you—your husband would prefer it in that form."

She nodded, and sat for a moment staring absently into the fire.

"This was Mr. Magnus' workroom, I suppose?" I said at last.

"Yes; when he was first really succeeding in business, he used always to bring some work home with him in the evening. But he outgrew that"—a shade of bitterness crept into her voice—"and during the last ten years of his life he used the room hardly at all. But he is using it again now," she added, in another tone. "Every night."

I stared across at her, wondering if she could be in earnest. Certainly her countenance gave every impression of earnestness.

"He will be here to-night," she went on. "It is a little early yet. He usually comes at eight-thirty."

"You mean he is here in the spirit," I said, trying to speak lightly.

"In the spirit, of course."

I breathed a sigh of relief. I fancied that I began to understand.

"Many people believe that their dead watch over them," I said.

"Oh, Mr. Magnus isn't watching over me," said my companion quickly. "There is a certain thing he desires me to do. Once that is done, I don't believe he will bother me any more. I left his note with you this morning. Did you bring it with you?"

"Yes," I said, and got it out of my pocket and handed it to her. "But really, Mrs. Magnus," I continued, "you don't mean to tell me seriously that you saw him write this?"

"I certainly did. He wrote it under my eyes, sitting at that desk three nights ago."

Again I looked at her to see if she was speaking seriously.

"I see you do not believe me," she added.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Magnus," I corrected; "of course I believe you—that is, I believe that you believe. But I cannot but think you are being imposed upon in some way."

A flush of anger crept into her cheeks.

"Do you think I am a woman easily imposed upon?" she asked. "Let me tell you the story, Mr. Lester."

"That is what I have been hoping you would do," I said. "I am very anxious to hear it."

"After my husband's death," she began, "I decided to use this room as my office or workroom. I went through his desk and cleared it out. There were no papers of importance there; but I found one thing which gave me a shock. That was a letter, pushed back and I suppose forgotten in one of the drawers, which proved to me that my husband had been unfaithful."

I was not surprised, of course, after what Godfrey had told me, but I managed to murmur some polite incredulity.

"Oh, it was true," she went on bitterly. "I knew he had grown away from me, but I never suspected that—that he could be so vulgar!" That, of course, was the way in which it would appeal to her—as vulgar.

"It is that which is worrying him now," she added.

"You mean—"

"No matter. He shall have the money to-night, and that will be ended. Let me go on with my story. As I said, I began to use this room. I kept my papers in the desk yonder, and worked there regularly every day. But one morning, when I came in, I noticed something unusual—an odor of tobacco. You know Mr. Magnus was a great smoker."

"Yes," I said.

"You may have noticed that he always smoked a heavy black cigar which he had made for him especially in Cuba. It had a quite distinctive odor."

"Yes," I said again. I had noticed more than once the sweet, heavy aroma of Magnus' cigars.

"I recognized the odor at once," went on Mrs. Magnus. "It was from one of his cigars. When I opened the desk, I found a little heap of ashes on his ash tray, which I had been using to keep pins in, and the remnant of the cigar he had been smoking."

"He?" I repeated. "But why should you think—"

"Wait," she interrupted, "till you hear the rest. I cleaned off the tray and went through my day's work as usual. The next morning I found the same thing—and something more. Some one had been trying to write on the pad of paper on the desk."

"Trying to write?" I echoed.

"Yes, trying—as though some force were holding him back."

She went over to the desk, unlocked a little drawer, and took out several sheets of paper.

"Here is what I found that morning," she said, and handed me a sheet from an ordinary writing pad.

I saw scrawled across it an indecipherable jumble of words. She had expressed it exactly—it seemed as though some one had been trying to write with a weight clogging his hand. And there was something about this scrap of paper—something convincing and authentic—which struck heavily at my skepticism. Here was what a lawyer would call evidence.

"It kept on from day to day," continued Mrs. Magnus, sitting down again. "Every morning the little heap of ashes and fragment of cigar, and a scrawl like that—until finally, one morning, I understood what was happening in this room, for three words were legible."

She handed me another sheet of paper. At the top were the words, "My dear wife," and under them again an indecipherable scrawl.

"Did you tell any one of all this?" I asked.

"Not a word to any one. But I decided to investigate."

"How?"

"By staying in this room at night."

I could guess from her tone what the resolution had cost her.

"And you did?"

"Yes. I came up right after dinner, leaving word that I was not to be disturbed. I went first to the desk to assure myself that the tray was empty and that there was no writing on the top sheet of paper. Then I switched off the light and sat down here by the fire and waited."

"That was brave," I said. "What happened?"

"For an hour, nothing. Then I was suddenly conscious of an odor of tobacco, as though some one smoking a cigar had entered the room, and an instant later I heard that chair before the desk creak as though it had been swung around. I switched on the light at once. The chair *had* turned. It had been facing away from the desk, and it was now faced toward it."

She stopped a moment, and I saw that her excitement of the morning was returning. Indeed, my own heart was beating with a quickened rhythm as I glanced around at the desk. I saw that the chair was facing away from it.

"The odor of tobacco grew stronger," went on Mrs. Magnus, "and, even as I watched, a little mass of ashes fell into the tray."

"From nowhere?"

"Apparently from nowhere, but of course it was from the cigar that he was smoking."

"Did you see the smoke?"

"No; how could I?"

Really, I didn't know. I wished that I had given more study to the details of spirit manifestation. I didn't remember that I had ever heard of a ghost smoking a cigar, but doubtless such cases existed. The point was this: Why, if the ashes from the ghost's cigar became visible when knocked off, shouldn't the smoke become visible when expired? Or did the fact that it had been inside an invisible object render it permanently invisible? I fancied this was what Mrs. Magnus had meant by her question. Perhaps she had studied the subject. At any rate, it was too deep for me.

"A moment later," she went on, "another mass of ashes fell; then perhaps five minutes passed, and I saw the remnant of the cigar placed on the tray. I confess that my nerves gave way at that point, and I fled from the room."

"Locking the door after you?"

"No; but I came back and locked it ten or fifteen minutes later."

"Did you enter the room?"

"Yes; I had left the light burning and entered to turn it off. I found on the desk another note beginning, 'My dear wife.' "

"And then what?"

"I was here the next night and the next. There was something about it that fascinated me, and I saw that there was no reason for fear. In the end it came to seem almost natural—almost as if he were here in the flesh."

"And always the same things happened?"

"Yes, or nearly so, the writing growing more legible all the time."

"And then?"

"Then, three nights ago, I grew brave enough to go and stand by the desk, and look over his shoulder, as it were, while he wrote the note which I showed you this morning."

"You mean that he actually did write it while you were looking over his shoulder?"

"I mean that the words formed themselves on the sheet of paper under my eyes, precisely as they flowed off his pen."

"And there wasn't any pen?"

"There wasn't anything. Only the ashes and the odor of tobacco."

I glanced across at Mrs. Magnus sharply. Could it be possible that she was inventing all of this incredible tale?

"No," she said, answering my thought; "it happened precisely as I tell it. I am hoping that you will see for yourself before long. It is almost time for him to come."

I felt the hair crawling up my scalp as I glanced around again at the desk. Like everybody else, I had always professed a lively interest in ghosts and a desire to meet one; but now that it seemed about to be gratified, the desire weakened perceptibly.

"I didn't at first intend to give him the money," she went on. " I didn't see why I should. He was dead. It was mine. He had never, in his life, given me fifty thousand dollars. But when, the next night, the money wasn't there, he ex- packets over to Mrs. Magnus.

"In writing?"

She nodded and held another sheet of paper out to me. On it, in Peter Magnus' hand, was written:

My Dear Wife: Do not delay. I must right a great wrong before either of us can rest in peace.

"And from this you judge that he wants the money to—to—"

"Yes," she said, not waiting for me to finish. "Even then

I hesitated. I did not see that I had any concern in his misdeeds. But last night—"

She stopped, and I saw sweep across her face the sudden pallor I had noted in the morning.

"Yes," I encouraged, "last night—"

She was clutching the chair arms convulsively, trying to force her trembling lips to form the words. What horrible thing was it had happened last night? What—

And at that instant I was conscious of the odor of tobacco in the air, and distinctly heard the low grating of the office chair as it swung around.

CHAPTER III

I suppose the student of the supernatural always has to fight against the excitement of the unknown—an excitement which clouds the judgment and confuses reason. Certainly, as I turned my head and sprang to my feet, I was very far from being a cool and collected observer; yet, indisputably, the chair *had* turned. Indeed, I snapped my head around in time to see the last of its movement toward the desk. And at the same instant my nostrils caught more strongly the sweet and heavy odor of Peter Magnus' cigar. For a moment all was still. Then Mrs. Magnus rose and beckoned me forward.

"Come," she said, and with an effort I compelled my feet to follow her.

It was a battle between instinct and reason. Instinct was trying to hurl me out of the room and out of the house. Reason was telling me—in a very faint voice, it is true—that there was nothing to be afraid of. I have always been proud of the fact that I *did* approach the desk, instead of making for the door.

And I was even brave enough to glance behind it. One glance was sufficient. The triangular space between the walls and the back of the desk was empty. I don't know why that should have afforded me any relief, but it did.

Then, before my eyes, not three feet away from them, a little gob of ashes dropped from the empty air into the tray.

I am free to confess that that sight swept away any remnant of doubt I may have had in the reality of the unreal—if I may use such a term. Peter Magnus was sitting in that chair. There could be, to my mind, no question of it.

But if any doubt had existed, it would have been ended by what followed.

For my eye was caught by the pad of paper on the desk, and, even as I watched it, I saw unfold upon it, one after another, these words:

My Dear Wife: Place the money on this desk and leave me. I shall be at rest. Good-by.

I wish I could describe to you the sensation which shook me as I witnessed this miracle. For there the words were, and I had seen them flow smoothly from an invisible pen—from Peter Magnus' pen, for the writing was his.

"I have the money," I said, and I caught up my bag from the floor, unlocked it, and took out the five sealed packets. "There are one hundred hundred-dollar bills in each," I explained, almost as if he could hear me—indeed, I was quite sure at the moment that he did hear me; and I passed the packets over to Mrs. Magnus.

Without a word she placed them on the desk, then turned to me.

"Come," she said. "That is all. Good-by, Peter," she added, and there was a little sob in her voice. "God bless you."

Was it my fancy, or did something like a sigh come from that unseen presence in the chair? It was in a sort of maze that I followed Mrs. Magnus from the room. She switched off the light and then closed the door.

"Thank God that is over," she said.

I suddenly realized that my face was dripping with perspiration, and I mopped it feverishly with my handkerchief.

"I would never have believed," I began stammeringly; "I never thought—why, it's a miracle—it's—"

"Yes, a miracle," repeated Mrs. Magnus. "Though there have been many instances of the dead returning."

"Have there?" I asked. "Well, of course, I have heard of them, but I never thought them worthy of belief. But now—"

We had reached the foot of the stairs, and I got my coat down from the rack and struggled into it. I found that I had mechanically picked up my bag as I left the room overhead.

"I want to thank you, Mr. Lester," said Mrs. Magnus, facing me, "for coming here to-night. You have been of the greatest help to me."

"Certainly," I agreed. "Very happy—a great privilege."

I felt that I was talking nonsense, but what, in Heaven's name, is a man to say who has just been through an experience like that? But Mrs. Magnus seemed to understand.

"Thank you," she said, and gave me her hand. Then she opened the street door, and a moment later I found myself groping my way down the steps. Once down, I paused for a deep breath; then I started up the street. But I had scarcely taken a dozen steps when a hand fell upon my arm and drew me into the shadow of a doorway.

CHAPTER IV

For an instant, with the thought of spirits still upon me, I tried to shake away the hand; then, as I started around at my assailant, I saw that it was Godfrey.

"Well, Lester," he said, "did you leave the fifty thousand?"

I nodded; I was even yet scarcely capable of connected speech.

Godfrey looked at me curiously.

"You look like you'd seen a ghost," he said.

"I have."

He laughed amusedly.

"Peter Magnus?"

I nodded.

"How is the old boy?"

"Look here, Godfrey," I said, "this isn't a thing to speak of in that tone. There's something sacred about it."

His face sobered as he looked at me. It grew serious enough to suit even my mood.

"So you were imposed on, too," he said at last.

I didn't like the words, nor the tone in which they were uttered.

"No, I wasn't imposed on," I said tartly. "I must be getting along, Godfrey. I haven't anything to tell you."

"Not just yet," he said. "Come over here across the street, Lester, where I can have an eye on the Magnus house. Don't you see—if I was wrong this morning, then you were right."

"Right?"

"If she told you the truth, some one is trying to do her out of fifty thousand dollars."

"She's given it to her husband," I said. "She thinks he's going to use it as you said."

"Given it to her husband?"

"Well, placed it on the desk in front of him."

"Did you *see* him?"

"I saw him write a note," I said doggedly. "You can't see a spirit, you know—its impalpable."

By this time we were deep in the shadow of another doorway across the street, and Godfrey leaned back against a pillar and mused for a moment.

"Of course," he said at last, "I don't want you to do anything unprofessional, Lester, but I really think you'd better tell me. You didn't hesitate to call me in this morning."

"I thought then that somebody was trying to bunco Mrs. Magnus."

"And I think so now," said Godfrey. "Surely you know you can trust me."

I demurred a while longer, but finally told him the whole story. When I had ended, he gave a little low whistle of amazement.

"Well," he said, "that's what I call clever. There's a certain artistic touch about it—only one man—"

He fell silent again, absently gnawing his under lip.

"How long are you going to stay here?" I demanded at last.

"Not long," he answered. "Only until that light goes out over yonder."

He nodded toward one of the upper windows of the Magnus house. Even as I looked at it, the light disappeared.

"Now," he said, "we'd better be moving up a little closer, Lester. Around this way, so we can't be seen from the door."

"You mean you think somebody is coming out of that house?"

"Certainly. The ghost's coming out. You didn't expect him to stay there all night, did you? That would be a little —well—indelicate, don't you think?"

"But how—"

"How am I going to see him? Well, I think I'll see him all right. Besides, the money would be visible, wouldn't it? Or does it become invisible when the ghost puts it in his pocket?"

"The cigar was invisible," I said weakly, "and the pen."

Really, out here with Godfrey, it *did* seem pretty ridiculous.

I was going to say something more—perhaps to try to excuse myself for my credulity—but Godfrey silenced me with a gesture. We had crept along in the shadow of the adjoining building until we were beside the entrance to the Magnus house.

"Maybe he'll go out the back way," I breathed.

"There isn't any back way. All built up. It's this way, or none."

The thought occurred to me that a brick wall would make no difference to a spirit, but I felt that I was lapsing into a state of imbecility, and stood silent, shivering a little. For it had started to drizzle again.

Then from the direction of the house came the sound of a door softly closing, and I saw a shadow flit down the steps. It certainly looked like a ghost; but I heard Godfrey chuckle softly; then, with a bound, he was upon the figure and had it by the throat. I caught the sound of a sharp struggle, but it was over before I could collect myself sufficiently to go to Godfrey's assistance.

When I did get there I found him grimly surveying a small and wizened creature, whose arm he had linked to his own by means of a handcuff.

"Lester," he said, "allow me to introduce you to the ghost of Peter Magnus—otherwise Mr. Jemmy Blum, the Tom Thumb of con men. Jemmy," he added, "aren't you ashamed to be playing such tricks on my friend, Mr. Lester?"

The small creature's eyes twinkled maliciously as he glanced up at me.

"Ho," he said contemptuously, "'twasn't no trick to fool *him*. But I didn't know he was *your* friend. If I had, I'd 'a' let him alone."

CHAPTER V

I deserved the taunt, of course, but I winced a little at Godfrey's chuckle.

"You'd fool the devil himself, Jemmy," said his captor. "And now I'll thank you to pass over to me those five little packets which my friend here left on that desk up yonder."

Without a word Jemmy unbuttoned his coat and produced the five packets. I could not but admire the coolness with which he accepted defeat.

"Take 'em, Lester," said Godfrey, "and put 'em back in your bag. We'll leave 'em over at the Tenderloin station, where we'll lodge this gentleman for the night. No use to disturb Mrs. Magnus till morning," he added, with a glance at the gloomy house. "Then we'll have Jemmy give us a special performance of his impersonation of the ghost of Peter Magnus."

The prisoner laughed.

"Glad to," he said. "I think you'll find it A one."

"No doubt," assented Godfrey. "As soon as Lester told me the story I knew you were the only man who could have worked it. And then there was the desk."

"Of course," agreed the prisoner. "You'd see that."

This was all Greek to me, but I knew the explanation would come in time. Meanwhile I carefully stowed away the five precious packets in my bag.

"Why can't we go over to my rooms at the Marathon and hear the story?" I suggested. "It's right across the street from the station."

"All right," said Godfrey, and led the way down the street, with Jemmy keeping step with him as well as his short legs would permit. Five minutes later we were in my rooms, and I switched on the lights and got out the cigars.

"If you'll see that the doors are locked, Lester, I'll open this handcuff temporarily," said Godfrey. "But first," and he ran his hands over his prisoner's person. "Ah, I thought so," he said, and produced a small revolver of exquisite workmanship. "You always were a connoisseur, Jemmy," he added, examining the weapon, and then slipping it into his own pocket. "All right. Now you sit down over there and be good."

"Oh, I'll be good," said Jemmy. "I guess I know when I'm crimped. Thanks," he added, accepting the smoke I offered him.

When the cigars were drawing nicely we were ready to hear the story. Not until then did I fully realize what a little fellow Jemmy was. Now I saw that he was almost a dwarf, little if any over four feet in height, and very slightly built. His face, shrunken and wrinkled, had that look of prenatural wisdom which dwarfs sometimes have, and his little black eyes were incredibly bright. He was evidently something of a dandy, for his clothes were immaculate. I admired again the aplomb with which he accepted the situation.

"Well," he began, "to make a long story short, I started on this lay just after old Magnus' death, when a friend of mine in the fortune-tellin' line told me Mrs. Magnus was a spiritualist."

"A spiritualist?" I queried, in surprise.

"Oh, yes; had been for years. That give me my clue, so I—ah—got into the house."

"How?" demanded Godfrey.

"That's telling."

"Bribed a servant, of course," said Godfrey. "We'll look them over in the morning. Go on."

"I got inside the house, looked over the ground, an' decided on my line of operation. I wanted something neat an' effective, an' I worked on it a good while before I had it goin' just right. There were so many little details. It took a lot of practice—these things do—an' then I had to remodel the inside of the desk—shorten up the drawers, an' make room for myself behind them. Luckily I'm little, an' the desk was one of the biggest I ever saw."

"So you were in the desk?" I asked.

"Sure," he chuckled. "Where else? Lookin' at you out of one of the pigeon-holes, an' wonderin' if I'd better risk it."

"And you decided you would?"

"Yes," said Jemmy slyly; "I saw you were scart to death, an' I was afraid if I didn't demonstrate for the old lady, I wouldn't get the money."

"How did you know she had it?"

"I heard you tell her you'd brought it, down in the parlor."

"Oh," I said; "then it was your step I heard in the hall?"

"I guess so, if you heard one. I just had time to get upstairs an' make my plant before you came in. The rest was easy."

"But the ashes?" I said.

"Flicked out through a pigeonhole. That's what took practice, to make 'em fall just right. Also the cigar."

"And the odor of tobacco?"

He got a little vial out of his pocket, uncorked it, and again I caught the sweet and heavy odor of Peter Magnus' cigar.

"An' here's a fine point I'm proud of," said Jemmy. "I had this made from half a dozen of Magnus' cigars I found in a box in his room. So the smell was just right. I thought for a while of showin' some smoke, but didn't dare risk it."

"But the note," I said. "That was the cleverest of all."

Jemmy chuckled and glanced at Godfrey.

"You'll understand that, Jim," he said. "You remember I worked it backward in that National City Bank case."

Godfrey nodded.

"I remember the signature disappeared from old Murgatroyd's check."

"Backward or forward, it don't make no difference. It all depends on the acid."

"What acid?"

"Ah," chuckled Jemmy, "you'd like to know, wouldn't you? You never will. But it all depends on it. If I put the acid in before the salt, the writin' disappears at the end of two hours; if I put the salt in before the acid, the writin' don't appear for the same length of time. It took me five years to work it out."

"But the writing didn't all appear at once," I objected.

"Of course not," said Jemmy impatiently. "It wasn't all wrote at once, was it? It appeared just like it was wrote."

"How could you time it?"

"Why," answered Jemmy still more impatiently, "I began operations at the same time every night, didn't I? I timed the writin' for eight-forty-five."

"But the chair?" I persisted.

Jemmy shot a disgusted glance at Godfrey.

"Any faker on Sixth Avenue can do that," he said. "A hook on a thread. Anything else?"

"Yes," I said, "one thing. What horror did you perpetrate last night?"

Jemmy grinned mechanically as he looked at me, and I even fancied he reddened a little.

"Did she tell you about that?" he asked.

"She tried to, but couldn't. What was it?"

"Well, you know," said Jemmy apologetically, "I had to bring matters to a head some way, for the old girl certainly did hate to shell out. I was sorry to have to scare her, but I couldn't help it."

"But what did you do?"

Jemmy blew a ring, and watched it fade away in front of him.

"I don't think I'll tell," he said at last.

Godfrey had been listening with an amused smile.

"We'll get that detail from Mrs. Magnus," he said. "Accept my compliments, Jemmy. It was cleverly done. I'm almost sorry you didn't get away with it."

"Oh," answered Jemmy, with studied indifference, "that's all in the day's work, you know. But thank you all the same, Jim."

He was flicking the ashes from the end of his cigar as he spoke, and I saw that he didn't meet Godfrey's eyes.

The latter looked at him an instant; then, with a low exclamation, sprang to his feet, and snapped open the bag in which I had stowed the packets Jemmy had given me. He ripped one of them open, and disclosed, not ten thousand dollars in currency, but a neat bundle of blank paper!

Jemmy was looking at him now, and his face was alight with triumph.

"How did you know I was there?" Godfrey demanded.

"I didn't," grinned Jemmy. "But I wasn't takin' any chances."

"Who was your pal?"

"That's tellin'," answered Jemmy easily.

"Did you see any of the servants, Lester?"

"Only one," I said. "I didn't notice anything about her, except that she was rather good-looking, and—oh, yes—the little finger of her left hand was missing."

Godfrey grabbed the telephone, and I heard him call headquarters, and give terse orders to send a detail at once to the Magnus house, to watch all ferries and trains, and to search all the thieves' haunts in the city for Kate Travis—"Lady" Kate. Headquarters seemed to know perfectly whom he meant.

"You won't get her," said Jemmy calmly, as Godfrey hung up the receiver. "She got away as soon as we turned the corner. She's got a good half hour's start."

"Come along," said Godfrey roughly, and snapped the handcuffs on again. I could see that he was deeply chagrined. "Good night, Lester. I've made a botch of this thing. I've got to catch that woman."

But he hasn't caught her yet, and I suppose, when Jemmy finishes his term, he will find his share of that fifty thousand dollars waiting for him.

I hope so, anyway.

The Episode of the Black Casquette

BY JOSEPH ERNEST

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YES, I have encountered him at last, the veritable birdman! Almost I had commenced to believe that such an individual did not in effect exist—with the exception, *bien entendu,* of myself. For, as I told them when they offered me a *vin d'honneur* on the occasion of my decoration with the Cross of the Legion, the recognition was long overdue. Indeed, I assured them, the only circumstance that prevented me from flying at the age of three was the fact that messieurs the inventors had not then produced an aeroplane.

But now I have encountered, as I say, another such instinctive aviator to whom flight appears to be as natural as walking. And thou seest by my bandages, my poor friend, what it is that has in consequence arrived to me!

Unhappy meeting! It is with pain and difficulty still that I lift an arm. I can no more, since my accident, illustrate my remarks with appropriate gesture. Forgive, therefore, *mon ami,* a story inadequately picturesque, vivid, *mouvant.* And yet—we have brought each other fortune, this young Monsieur Power and I. Fix a little the pillows up, and you shall hear.

A man-eagle, I assure you! A veritable condor of the Andes hatched in human shape, who has, nevertheless, discovered his gift only to renounce it at once and forever.

Our first meeting was curiously disturbing. He appeared suddenly at a door of my ateliers on the flying ground at Mineola, very tall, very *soigné,* smiling in the way he had that showed all his strong, square teeth as he recognized me in conversation with my faithful mechanician, Georges.

This latter, grown portly and nervous since marrying a Montmartre shopkeeper, I have since promoted to be my chief designer.

"Pardon the intrusion," said the stranger. "I perceive you are about to murder the stout gentleman. I will wait your convenience."

"Quite on the contrary, monsieur," I explained, bowing. "We discuss merely the theory of the explosion turbine. If monsieur will give himself the trouble to enter—"

"That is my card," he replied, advancing. "I want a strong, swift biplane, and a mechanic to attend to it."

I glanced from the card to this extraordinary young man with interest. For the name itself, John Hamlin Power, told me of a career in Wall Street—brief, but conspicuous in its daring and success; a career in which this immaculate, smiling young cotillion leader had made the very monarchs of finance fear the élan of his attack, the relentless quality of his grip.

"I have taken a fancy," he went on, "to possess the identical machine with which you accomplished your recent Mount McKinley record. It is perhaps for sale?"

"Perfectly, if monsieur wishes," I responded, with another bow. "But it is a machine of unusual speed and power. Monsieur can already fly, no doubt?"

"I do not anticipate any difficulty. As a matter of fact, I have not yet attempted it. It is for that purpose that I have come to buy a machine. It would be a favor if you would arrange to deliver it to me in Westchester to-morrow. The mechanic will, of course, arrive at the same time, as I shall wish to commence practice at once."

He turned aside to inspect a motor that lay dismounted on a wooden stand, as if there were nothing further to discuss. Indeed, though his speech was rapid and incisive, and his every movement full of an *allure* that spoke of splendidly poised muscles, he was in face and manner alike the most singularly immobile man I had ever met. He gave the impression of employing neither words nor actions except in case of clear necessity.

I exchanged glances with Georges, who had turned up his eyes, spread his arms, and allowed them to fall again limply to his sides. I coughed. Monsieur Power drew himself up from his inspection of the motor and smiled again expectantly.

"But the question of tuition?" I stammered. "Monsieur has no doubt arranged for the services of an instructor?"

There was the slightest twinkle in that steadfast gaze of his. He had the bravest, and yet the tenderest, eyes in the world.

"I'm afraid I have not sufficient time for the regular course," he said. "I am a rather busy man, as you possibly know. I have consequently taken lessons in advance, by mail. May I expect the machine to-morrow as arranged?"

I murmured something to the effect that he had perhaps underestimated the difficulties of aviation.

"Are they not exaggerated?" he inquired. "You taught my friend, Miss Hamilton Warren, to fly, did you not?"

"Mademoiselle, it is true, flies here almost daily," I admitted.

"Just so! It does not seem to me that there can be anything very difficult in what a girl can do. However, if you will be so good as to deliver the biplane we will see."

Under that clear, steady gaze of his I was powerless to protest. Behind him I could see the good Georges struggling palpably for breath, and waving his hands to the rafters. I contented myself with a profound bow; whereupon, with the same quick, alert movement with which he had appeared, this strange young man departed. Georges and I fell gasping upon each others' necks, and stared together after his tall, receding figure.

"Without doubt he is mad, this Monsieur Power," I said at last. "You remember that he has just made two millions in a bear raid. Doubtless it has turned his brain. Name of a name! He pretends to have taken flying lessons from an institute of correspondence, and I have promised him a biplane of one hundred horse power! Georges, *mon ami,* you must yourself accompany it and give him counsel lest he break his neck!"

Not satisfied with this precaution, I myself flew the biplane over to Westchester on the morrow, and explained the controls to Monsieur Power in an extended passenger flight.

He was, it appeared, an amateur of the balloon, and accustomed to great heights. When I handed the machine over to him, with the engine throttled down so that he might try rolling practice on the ground, he waited until he was out of our reach, whipped the motor into its full power, heaved himself into the air, and flew back the whole length of his grounds—alighting gently as a falling leaf.

"It seems pretty simple," he said, as he swung himself out of the nacelle. "I do not think I need detain you, Monsieur Lacroix, if your assistant Georges will be good enough to consider himself my guest, and keep the motor running."

It was in vain that I besought him to have patience. He replied only that his time was limited, and that he had given the subject careful study in theory.

And with that assurance I had to depart, little content. First, however, I warned him of one or two pitfalls—as, for instance, that he must never stop his engine in an emergency, as one does instinctively in an auto, because the greater the danger the more need he would have of motive power to get him out of it. Also, I told him not to fly above trees or water, where the currents would suck him downward, but to steer over the darkest patches of land, where the heat of the sun is absorbed, and the air in consequence rises.

In what state of emotion I was maintained by the letters of Georges during the ensuing fortnight, I will make you judge.

"A moi!" he writes to me in the first week. "I am in the clutch of a madman! Each morning I am awakened at six, that I may plunge with him in the lake of cold water attached to the mansion, he having first made *la boxe* noisily with a fist ball on the floor directly above. To-day in his machine he has described figures of eight in the space of his grounds even, banking the planes at an inclination *affreuse!"*

Again he writes: "I am now to accompany him on a cross-country raid. Farewell to my wife and little one. I will die like a Montmartrois for the honor of France!"

Finally an appeal—urgent, pitiful, telegraphic:

"Take me away, *je t'en prie!* This maniac wishes now to discuss the possibility of a somersault in the air. I can no more.—Georges."

Thereupon I replaced him with another mechanic, and he returned, appearing worn and noticeably thinner.

"It seems to me, *tout de même,*" I remarked, "that this young monsieur knows very well what he is about. We have not been asked to repair a single stick of his machine."

"True," replied Georges. "But that is not his ambition, to break wood. It was his neck that he wished to break, and incidentally my own. Wait, my friend, until you have seen him fly. I, who speak to you, have faced death daily these weeks past, and my clothes hang loose upon me!"

And I was fated to see this monsieur, also, before very long, on the occasion of his dramatic appearance upon the grounds of my flying school. I must explain that Mineola had become a social institution, for already I taught the younger members of the rich sportsman set the new diversion that science had placed within their reach. Crowds assembled each fine day to witness the first flutterings or the finished flights of their friends.

On this occasion the lawn before the hangars was bright with flowers and gay with the costumes of pretty women, in deference to whom I had even permitted what the society reporters began to call "aviation teas," placing little tables about the grass, where the chatter was not too much interrupted by the vicious rattle and the driving smoke of motors under test. I did this the more readily as it prevented the uninstructed from wandering into the path of the machines, which buzzed about the grounds like crippled beetles trying to rise into the air.

The grounds, particularly in expectation of a flight by Miss Warren, bore very much in consequence the appearance of a garden party, and I looked with pride upon a scene such as only the historic flying schools of my dear France had hitherto witnessed.

It was with a start that I recognized, while gazing upon this throng of flower-like women and gallant young men, the figure so tall, so commanding of the aged Monsieur Warren himself. I knew that he did not belong to this plutocratic young sporting set, of which he even disapproved. Moreover, the old financier had never before condescended to recognize the prowess of his daughter as an aviator. Indeed, I understood that the least reference to it had been forbidden in his presence. I hastened forward to welcome him, with joy in this new and powerful convert to the science of flight, and together we watched the preparation of Miss Warren's great French biplane, her beautiful *Cygne,* which she had insisted upon bringing with her from Paris.

Ah, *mon vieux,* I cannot describe to you the emotion that seized me as she advanced from the hangars, this beautiful girl, to mount her great white bird! The Comte de Châlons, who had followed her from Europe, and rarely left her side, hurried after her with her leather flying gauntlets—for while it was warm on the ground, there came from aloft reports of a chilling wind. I saw the tall, bent old man, her father, gaze with eyes moist with pride and affection on that superb figure of young womanhood as she swung gracefully out toward the gallant machine that awaited her in the sunlight, chatting gayly with her companion as she walked. She wore a thick-knitted jersey of brown silk, a simple brown skirt, and leather gaiters, and a brown leather automobile cap covered her shining, dark hair. Like a slim, brown statue she stood at last on the step of her biplane in the breeze, and I saw the Comte de Châlons bend over her hand as he assisted her into the nacelle.

Well, he had reason, that one! She is a better flier than I can ever make out of him.

A run of fifty yards, and she was aloft with the practiced leap of the expert pilot. The next minute she was breasting the breeze far above our heads, the rear edges of the huge planes quivering transparent against the sky, her motor roaring impetuously. As she passed, I had a single glimpse of her face—bathed in full sunlight, radiant, joyous!

I looked then with curiosity upon the aged Monsieur Warren. The great financier leaned upon his cane, and I saw that the hand that held it was blue and trembling. As he gazed skyward, his breath came deeply as in a sob.

"Ah, monsieur," I thought, with a surge of pride, "it is I, Lacroix, who have enabled you to enjoy a parallel triumph. She is your daughter whom they applaud, truly—but she is also my pupil!"

Figure to yourself my surprise, therefore, when he turned to me suddenly in appeal, and, with a hand that trembled on my arm, besought me to take him away.

"I cannot stand it, my dear Lacroix—it isn't safe!" he said, in a low voice.

He repeated these words several times, his lip quivering like that of a child who suffers, as I led him into the drawing office of the ateliers. There he seated himself, bent and gray, upon the edge of an armchair.

"It's no use, I can't stand it," he said again. "I assure you that I could see the thing shaking, as it passed overhead, in every stick and wire of it. It can't be safe! And there she is, five hundred feet high, with her life hanging on a thread."

"I assure you also, monsieur," I protested, "that I have this very morning examined every nut and bolt, every brace and valve and stay in the entire *appareil*. Never have I permitted your daughter to ascend without such an inspection. I would stake my life upon the perfect integrity of the machine."

He smiled, a little querulously.

"You are accustomed to stake your life, Monsieur Lacroix. As for me, I am an old man. The old are obstinate and selfish. I abhor the entire proceeding."

Plaudits came from the gay crowd outside as mademoiselle's machine again roared above the hangars. The old man shook his massive head.

"Of course, you don't see it as I do," he went on. "If you had considered risks, you would have acomplished nothing. It is natural that you should think only of the glory and conquest of flight. But I think of the little girl I held on my knee the night her mother died, and I can neither stay away in peace when Ella flies, nor can I bear to watch her."

"But you are powerful, Monsieur Warren," I said, "a commander of the captains of finance. If you said even that a country should not make war, its cannon would rust in the parks, and its soldiers play leapfrog in the casernes. Surely you can bend the will of a young girl who is also your daughter?"

The old man's smile became grim.

"I may be all that you say," he sighed. "But, nevertheless, if you chose to wring my neck at this moment, I could do little to prevent you. Neither dare I stand between an American girl and the desire of her heart."

I looked with sympathy upon this gaunt, mighty, old warrior of Wall Street, bent under the shadow of apprehension and anxiety, and I knew why he had at last visited Mineola. And as I looked, I, too, my friend, saw clearly for the first time the reverse of the bright medal of aerial conquest. I saw the graves of lost comrades, I saw the homes in mourning, I saw mothers who wept for their bravest boys. Truly the price was heavy, and I knew in my heart that it had not been paid in full.

"Monsieur knows," I said, "that I was once a poor mechanician. What I am now, flight has made me, and I have worked for the glory of flight. But now I perceive that in encouraging mademoiselle your daughter to fly, I have perhaps done wrong. I promise you that in future I will do my best to dissuade her."

He rose, and pressed my hand in gratitude.

"I am wealthy," he said. "I am rich beyond dreams. I can buy anything for my little girl that she desires—except a single moment's safety up in the air, or a single moment's true happiness on the earth. And in pursuit of this flying craze of hers, she may easily miss both."

He frowned suddenly as we emerged into the sunlight and saw the Comte de Châlons hasten to assist mademoiselle to dismount. Above the hangars the red storm cone had been hoisted, prohibiting further flight by pupils. Already the treetops were swaying ominously.

"After all, there are some things that can happen to a girl," said Monsieur Warren bitterly, "that may well be worse than breaking her neck in an aeroplane."

He departed in search of his automobile without another word. But I thought I knew what he meant.

It was at this moment that I first saw him fly, this marvelous birdman of a Hamlin Power. Away in the direction of New York, so high that he seemed to hang motionless just under the driving clouds, the spectators had caught sight of his huge biplane, and had delayed their departure to watch his approach. It was Georges, dancing on the grass beside me, who first proclaimed his identity.

"It is he, the crazy pupil!" he cried. "I have seen through my glass the little silk flag he attached to the nacelle. Now you are going to marvel that I still live!"

In a few moments the sound of his motor fell faintly on our ears as a whisper from the clouds. Then—*chut!*—it stopped, and in a single leap he dived a sheer thousand feet.

That in itself was amazing temerity for one who had flown just long enough to justify him in piloting an aero bus in a dead calm. But I was little prepared for what followed. Instead of continuing his flight horizontally at the end of that headlong dive, this tyro pulled up his elevator, sweeping through a sharp curve into an upward leap with all the dizzy impetus gained in his descent.

The crowd gasped. At my side Georges danced with anxiety upon the turf.

"You are right," I said. "He is certainly crazy, this young Monsieur Power."

"He calls it the *montagnes russes,* this trick," said Georges. "I have told him that everybody who ever did it is long dead, with the single exception of yourself, but that to him is entirely equal. See, he has dived again only just in time!"

And, in truth, another moment of upward flight would infallibly have caused him to lose headway, and fall backward, to flatten himself upon the ground. But he had with superb coolness entered upon a second dive of the most impressive, continuing his species of switchback descent until within a few hundred feet of the hangars. I saw his head protruding from the nacelle, incased in a flying helmet of perfectly black leather. At that height the *remous* and gusts hit him at unexpected angles, and his machine rose and fell and rocked, as if upon the waves of an invisible ocean. It was buffeted about until I knew that he could not be on his seat half the time. First one wing tip and then the other was blown upward, threatening irrevocable side slip, but always at the last moment his instinct—for it could have been nothing else—saved him in masterly fashion.

At one moment, indeed, as he banked high to turn down wind, it seemed that he was lost, and a woman in front of me turned away with a little cry of horror, her hands before her eyes.

But no! Blown like a leaf straight toward us, he wheeled again into the teeth of the wind at the same astonishing angle, finally landing neatly in front of the hangars. It was with an exclamation of relief that I saw him leap from his machine safe and sound.

With a number of mechanicians, I ran to greet him, and he held out a gloved hand, smiling in boyish delight and complete unconcern, and showing all his square, white teeth. I burst at once into protests.

"Bunk!" he exclaimed, with an irreverent laugh. "You fellows make a voodoo mystery of flight because it pays you. There's nothing very difficult about it, after all. One has only to keep cool."

I was going to reply with I know not what appeal to his reason, when the clear, contralto voice of Miss Warren came suddenly from behind me. She hastened to meet him, holding out both her hands.

"Jack, this is good of you!" she cried. "It's just your generous way—you couldn't possibly have forgiven me more gracefully. To think that you, of all people, should be the mysterious airman of Westchester who has set every one talking and wondering! Why, it was the pleasantest surprise in life to see you get down from that machine after such a wonderful flight. And my father has been here to-day, also. Two such converts in one afternoon is a coincidence that seems too good to be true."

The young Monsieur Power was regarding her, I noticed, with a sort of curious reserve.

"Maybe there's something in that," he said. "You mustn't get the idea that I've altered my ground in the least, Ella."

"But you are flying yourself, now!"

"Certainly, but that doesn't mean that I approve of it as an amusement for you."

"When did you begin?"

"Last month, when I bought the machine. Since then I've been practicing around home."

The girl started from him in amazement.

"Last month! Why, don't you know you might have killed yourself, cutting capers on a day like this?"

"Precisely what I have allowed myself to point out to monsieur," I interposed. "He attempted feats full of danger even for the expert."

"Well, I guess that's all right," he responded shortly. "A man's life wasn't given to him to nurse. Besides, flying is a great relief after a week in the city."

I turned aside, then, to superintend the disposal of the aeroplanes in their sheds, as it had become evident that a gale was in prospect. It was some minutes later that I received a sudden intimation from Miss Warren that she desired my presence outside her hangar.

"Mademoiselle wishes you to denounce the young American monsieur," added on his own account the mechanic who brought the message.

I found her confronting Monsieur Power, who was leaning in an attitude characteristically immobile against the landing carriage of his machine. The Comte de Châlons stood on one side, pulling at his mustache and staring from one to the other. Monsieur Power chewed a grass stem and smiled in a fashion a little *narquois*.

"Why not give in, Ella, and admit you have been in the wrong? You know you'll have to come to it, sooner or later."

He spoke quite pleasantly, but the girl's magnificent dark eyes were blazing with suppressed anger.

Give in! A thing unheard! She had never suffered compulsion in a young lifetime of following her own sweet way, this dollar princess. As they gazed upon each other, I could see a titanic battle of wills in progress beneath the outward calm of the discussion.

"You would not be so foolhardy, Jack," she said, controlling her voice with an effort. "You know, or at least if you don't know, Monsieur Lacroix and everybody else does, that you couldn't live two minutes in this wind."

"Monsieur Power, you are annoying mademoiselle in a grave degree," broke in the count, suddenly glaring. "My friends will lose no time in waiting on you."

The American swung round with one of those rapid, definite movements so habitual with him.

"Don't trouble your friends," he replied. "We can do without them. Come up and fly with me right away. We'll toss a quarter to decide who steers."

"It would be madness!" exclaimed the count, and his jaw dropped.

"Then kindly mind your own business," said Monsieur Power, chewing again on his grass stem, and talking through his teeth. "Now, Ella, time's up! Am I to go?"

The girl bit her lip, and seemed to struggle vainly for a reply, but the look in her eyes would have withered any man less accustomed to strife than this iron-jawed young soldier of fortune from Wall Street. In my turn, anger seized me as I saw her hesitate.

"You will pardon a further interruption, monsieur," I cried. "I can permit no such madness on my flying ground, and no such discourtesy to my pupils."

I beckoned the head mechanician.

"You will at once remove to a hangar the biplane of Monsieur Power," I told him, "and disconnect the ignition. Should he attempt to enter the nacelle again, you will cause him to evacuate it in march time and three movements!"

"And the first dago that tries it will get hurt," added Monsieur Power pleasantly.

"It's cowardly, Jack!" she cried hotly. "It's unworthy of you, a childish bluff like this!"

He must have been planning all the time how he would spring into his seat and start the motor, for when I looked round he was already there, and the great tractor screw was spinning as the exhaust spluttered viciously, making it impossible to reach him except from behind. With all my legs I ran round to the tail, calling upon the mechanicians to aid me.

Too late! The exhaust ripped out as he whipped his motor into her full horse power, and he leaped into the teeth of the wind with a swerve that almost tore off his lower plane against the ground.

"Imbecile!" I roared, but he no longer heard me. To save myself from a violent collision with his tail planes I was compelled to cling desperately to the frail wood and wire girder of the fuselage, and it was in this position that I was carried the length of the flying ground. The gale tore at my hair and distended my cheeks, the turf slipped away beneath me as smooth as green water in the speed of his mad attempt to force the machine into the air.

Slowly and with extreme care I edged my way inch by inch along the fuselage toward the main planes and the pilot's seat. Casting back a glance I saw the hangars, a mere white bar across the plain. A few spectators who had pursued us in a desultory, ineffectual manner stood now at long intervals in our wake, and gesticulated spasmodically.

The next moment we ran into a hollow, and they were lost to view behind the grassy slope.

It was then that the young American looked behind him for the first time, and realized that he had a passenger. Promptly he throttled down his engine into a slow splutter, and turned in his seat as the machine came to a standstill.

"I suppose you've had an uncomfortable minute or two," he grinned. "But it really wasn't your affair. I am perfectly entitled to fly whenever I feel like it."

Pleading that the roar of the motor had deafened me, I climbed up onto the passenger seat.

"It is beyond doubt, monsieur, that you are sane," I said. "But it is equally certain that you propose the act of a madman. Fortunately I have accompanied you, and it is impossible to rise from the ground with my weight on the tail, and my grip upon the elevator wires."

"Meaning that you refuse to let me ascend?"

"Most categorically!"

"But why?" he demanded. "Do you want Miss Warren to think that I was only bluffing, after all? I promised to show her something startling, and I'm going ahead with it."

"To begin with, it would be suicide," I rejoined. "In addition, you would be inflicting gratuitous distress upon mademoiselle."

At this he rose from his seat with the first sign of emotion I had seen in his manner.

"And what is it that she has inflicted for months on me?" he demanded hotly. "And on her father, too, and on all her friends? We can't pick up a newspaper any day, without going cold with fear that we will read of her maimed or dead in some accident. After all, it's only her own medicine."

He took off the black leather helmet, placed it on the seat, and wiped the motor grease from his brow. When he spoke again, it was in the even tones of a man who issues an ultimatum against an intolerable situation.

"There has been altogether too much of this flying business. It's no game for a girl. There is getting to be too much of this count thing. We don't want his sort around here. I've known Ella Warren since she was as big as a glass of milk! Do you think I am going to stand down for the first scented dago—forgive me if I speak disrespectfully of your countryman—whom she chooses to bring across the Atlantic at her heels? No, sir! It has to be stopped somewhere."

He halted a moment, and regarded me carefully. I could see that he was measuring with his eye the distance between us.

"I'm going to scare her stiff," he said, nodding. "Get down off this plane, Monsieur Lacroix!"

"Pardon me," I replied, with a low bow. "But that is for you to do."

And before he could seize me, with one blow of the foot planted suddenly in his chest I shot the young Monsieur Power squarely off his biplane onto the grass. Even as he measured his long length on the ground, I had seized the controls, and the aeroplane spurted fifty yards ahead of him. Ever since he had removed the black casquette, a wild idea, of a dramatic quality irresistible, had formed itself in my brain. I now seized the helmet and thrust it down upon my own head.

"It shall be finished as you wish," I cried. "But it is I, Lacroix, who am best qualified for the task!"

For I had seen, during that wild flight over the ground as I clung to the frail framework of the tail, a figure that I loved—a figure in brown, tall and graceful before the white hangars, a figure that clasped its hands in terror. And some instinct told me that the life of this Monsieur Power was necessary to the happiness of my beloved mademoiselle. I knew also that I alone without undue risk might break down the barrier of iron pride that had arisen between these two autocratic young people.

Qu'est-ce que tu veux que je te dise? I might have paid more heavily for the mad intoxication of that last flight. In a month or two I shall be again aloft.

I have often maintained that sooner or later a moment of emotion, of sheer joy in the struggle and risk, will cause the soberest pilot to throw discretion to the winds. It was so in this case.

Parbleu! I leap, I dive, I twist in figures of eight, I fight my way by inches against the wind, and, turning, I shoot back upon its current with the speed of a projectile. I am shaken and buffeted until I gasp for breath. I swerve, I dance, I caracole—I pirouette on a wing tip, catching my side slips on the rudder as one plays cup and ball. I dangle myself at the end of a single wire on the brink of eternity, crying defiance to the winds! *C'était de la folie*—the madness of battle. Far below me I could see an occasional spectator running like a rabbit, grotesquely waving his arms.

"Oh, yes, he is doubtless clever, this Power," I cry in my pride. "But he is, after all, nothing but a buzzard. It is I, Lacroix, who am alone veritable king of the air!"

Coquin de sort! I do not know exactly when the wire controlling the right *aileron* parted. I became aware merely that that side of the machine canted downward and refused to rise again in response to the lever. Like a flash, I thrust forward the elevator, hoping to reach the earth by a glide. But I arrived by a quicker maneuver—a whirling gust, a *tourbillon* of the most terrific, hurled the biplane sidelong to destruction.

The man who has been accustomed to face death meets it at last with a gentle sneer on his lip, as one who is vanquished by an enemy whom he knows to be in reality his inferior.

"So here he is at last, then, this Death," I said to myself. "Well, let us see what he will do!"

And in that instant the graceful biplane crashed into splinters, and I lay pinned in the wreckage beneath a shroud of torn white canvas. In the black casquette, later, they discovered a hole two inches wide, torn by the jagged edge of a broken stay.

I found them at my bedside when I awoke some days later, my Mademoiselle Warren and Monsieur Power. They leaned together, arm in arm, upon the rail at the foot, and the lovely face of my dear pupil was radiant with sympathy and happiness.

"Ha! What is it that it is, then?" I demand.

"Mr. Power won," said Miss Warren.

The young broker smiled with all his teeth.

"But he was unfairly abetted by a certain Monsieur Lacroix," went on Miss Warren. "That was a terrible practical joke you played on me with the black casquette, you know. They carried us away in the same auto, and they tell me that I looked as lifeless as you."

"And now I have lost my pupil!" I exclaimed ruefully.

"Dear Monsieur Lacroix, I had no choice," she responded, and moved to the bedside and held my hand. "I cannot oppose the wishes of all the people I love. Besides, it is a fair bargain. We have promised each other, Mr. Power and I, never to fly again."

"It is in one way a pity," I murmured. "For monsieur is without doubt a species of born birdman. But any one would make a parallel renunciation to stand in his shoes."

"You are dangerously romantic, Monsieur Jules," said mademoiselle. "If it were not your supreme virtue, it would be your principal fault."

"Too true, mademoiselle," I replied. "But it cannot be denied that I am at the same time a very pretty flier."

It was not until some time after they had departed that I found upon the table among my medicines two envelopes. One, small and dainty, was a formal announcement of the fiançailles of Miss Warren and the young Monsieur Power. The other, long and of an official shape, contained—ah, what do you guess?

It was a draft of the incorporation of a company to control my flying schools, and realize my dream of the all-steel monoplane of stability positively automatic. At the head I read the names of Messieurs Warren and Power as guarantors. There remain only blank spaces requiring my signature.

Bien alors! In a few days more I shall be able to hold a pen!

Cheap

BY MARJORIE L. C. PICKTHALL

Cheap

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RANSOME said that you might pick up specimens of all the unprettiest afflictions of body and soul in Herares ten years ago. He also said that when he saw any particularly miserable bit of human wreckage, white or brown, adrift on the languid tides of life about the jetty, he always said without further inquiry, "It's Henkel's house you're looking for. Turn to the left, and keep on turning to the left. And if God knew what went on under these trees, He'd have mercy on you."

The house was the last house on the last road of the town. You don't find it now, for no one would live in it after Henkel; and in a season or two the forest had swamped it as the sea swamps a child's boat on the beach. It was a white house in a garden, and after rain the scent of vanilla and stephanotis rose round it like a fog. The fever rose round it like a fog, too, and that's why Henkel got it so cheap. No fever touched him. He lived there alone with a lot of servants—Indians. And they were all wrecks, Ransome said, broken down from accident or disease—wrecks that no one else would employ. He got them very cheap. When they died he got more.

Henkel was a large, soft, yellowish man. Ransome said, "I don't mind a man being large and yellowish, or even soft in reason; but when he shines, too, I draw the line." Henkel had thick hands with bent fingers, and large, brown eyes. He was a Hollander, and in that place he stood apart. For he didn't drink, or gamble, or fight, or even buy rubber. He was just a large, peaceful person who bought things cheap.

He was very clever. He always knew the precise moment, the outmost low-water mark, of a bargain. His house was full of things he'd bought cheap from wrecked companies or dying men, from the mahogany logs in the patio to the coils of telegraph wire in the loft. His clothes never fitted him, for they belonged to men whom the fever had met on the way up the Mazzaron, and who had therefore no further use for clothes. The only things for which Henkel ever paid a fair price were butterflies.

"I went to his house once," said Ransome—"had to. A lame Indian in a suit of gaudy red-and-white stripes opened the door. I knew that striped canvas. It was the awnings of the old *Lily Grant,* and I saw along the seams the smoke-marks of the fire that had burnt her innards out. . . . Then the Indian opened the jalousies with a hand like a bundle of brown twigs, and the light shone through green leaves on the walls of the room. From ceiling to floor they flashed as if they were jeweled, only there are no jewels with just that soft bloom of color. They were the cases full of Henkel's butterflies.

"The Indian limped out and Henkel came in. He was limping, too. I looked at his feet and I saw that they were in a pair of some one else's tan shoes. That and a whiff from the servants' quarters made me feel a bit sick. I wanted to say what I had to say and get out as quick as I could. But Henkel would show me his butterflies. Most of us in that place were a little mad on some point. I was, myself. Henkel was mad on the subject of his butterflies. He told me the troubles he'd had getting them from Indians and negroes, and how his men cheated him. He took it very much to heart, and snuffled as he spoke. 'And there's one I haven't got,' he said, 'one I've heard of but can't find, and my lazy hounds of *hombres* can't find it either, it seems. It's one of the clear-wings—transparent. Here's a transparent silver one. But this new one is gold, transparent gold, and the spots are opaque gold.' His mouth fairly watered. 'I tell you, I will spend anything, pay anything, to get that gold butterfly. And if the natives can't or won't find it for me, my friend, I'll send for some one who can and will.'

"I quite believed him, though I was no friend of his. I didn't know much about butterflies, but I guessed that in Paris or London his collection would be beyond price. But I wasn't prepared, two months later, for Scott and his friend.

CHEAP

"Derek Scott. Ever meet him? A very ordinary kind of young Northerner. He was remarkable only in having everything a little in excess of his type—a little squarer in jaw and shoulder, a little longer in nose and leg, a little keener of eye and slower of tongue. I'd never have looked at him twice, as he landed from the dirty steamer with a lot of tin boxes, if it hadn't been that he was hale and sound, with hope in his eyes. Health and hope, at Herares!

"Then little Daurillac ran up the gangway, laughing. I looked at him—every one did—and wondered. And then, to cap the wonder, the two came up to me with their friendly, confident young faces, and asked for Henkel's house.

" 'Turn to the left,' I said. And then I added, 'You'll excuse me, but what does Henkel want of you?'

"Scott didn't answer at first, but looked me over with his considering eyes, and I remembered a collarless shirt and a four days' beard. But Daurillac said, 'He wants butterflies of us, Monsieur. I am an entomologist, and my friend he assists me.' He drew up very straight, but his eyes were laughing at himself. Then we exchanged names and shook hands, and I watched them going along the path to Henkel's.

"Next day Scott came down to the jetty. He sat on a stump and stared at everything. He was ready enough to talk, in his guarded way. Yes, he was new to the tropics; in some ways they were not what he had expected, but he was not disappointed. He was here for the novelty, the experience. But his friend, Louis Daurillac, had been in the Indies, and with some of Meyer's men in Burma after orchids. Louis's father was a great naturalist, and Louis was very clever. Yes, Henkel had got hold of him through Meyer. He wanted some one to find this butterfly for him—this golden butterfly at the headwaters of the Mazzaron—some one whose name was yet in the making, some one he could get cheap. . . . So Louis had come. He was very keen on it. Henkel was to bear all costs, to supply food, ammunition, trade-goods, etc., and pay them according to the number of the new specimens that they found. 'So you see,' said Scott, with his clean smile, 'Louis and I can't lose by it.'

"We talked a bit more, and then young Scott said to me, suddenly: 'Henkel has everything ready, and we start in the morning. You seem to be the only white man about here. Come and see us off, will you?' I said yes; afterward it struck me as curious that he should not have counted Henkel as a white man. He laughed and apologized for the touch of sentiment. 'It's like plunging head first into a very deep sea,' he explained, 'and one likes to have some one on the shore. You'll be here when we come back?' And I said yes, I'd be either unloading on the jetty or in the new cemetery by the canal. But he didn't smile. His light Northern eyes were gravely considering this land where life was held on a short lease, and he looked at me as if he were sorry for me.

"I saw them off the next day. There were six or eight men of Henkel's, loaded with food and trade-goods, and I saw that two of them were sickening where they stood. I looked in Daurillac's brilliant young face, and I hadn't the courage to say anything but, 'Have you plenty of quinine?' He tapped a big tin case, and I nodded. 'And what are you taking for the Indios?' I asked.

"He fairly bubbled over with laughter. 'You would never guess, Monsieur, but we take clocks, little American clocks. The Indios of the Mazzaron desire nothing but little clocks; they like the tick.'

"Their men had turned down one of the jungle paths. They shook hands with me, and Scott met my eyes with his grave smile. 'Just drawing breath for the plunge,' he said, with a glance at the forest beyond the last white roof. Daurillac slipped his arm through Scott's, and drew him after their slow-going *hombres*. At the bend of the path they turned and waved to me—Scott with a quick lift of the hand. But little Daurillac swept off his hat and stood half turned for a minute; the sun splashed on his dark head, on his Frenchified belt and puttees, on his white breeches, and on an outrageous pink shirt Henkel seemed to have supplied him with. He looked suddenly brilliant and unsubstantial, a light figure poised on the edge of the dark. . . . One gets curious notions in Herares. The next moment they were gone. The jungle had shut down on them, swallowed them up. They were instantly lost in it as a bubble is lost in the sea.

"Two days before I hadn't known of their existence. But

I was there to see them off, and I was there when Scott came back.

"It was well on into the rainy season, and I was down with fever. I was in my house, in my hammock, and the wind was swinging it. It was probably the hammock that did all the swinging, but I thought it was the house, and I had one foot on the floor to try and steady it. But it was no use. The walls lifted and sank all in one rush, like the sides of a ship at sea. Outside I could see a pink roof, a white roof, a tin roof, and then the forest, with the opening of a path like the black mouth of a tunnel. I wanted to watch this tunnel, because I had an idea I'd seen something crawl along it a good while before. But I couldn't manage it; I had to shut my eyes. And then I felt the scratching on my boot.

"I caught hold of the sides of the hammock, but it was some time before I could manage to pull myself up. Then I looked down.

"A man was lying on the floor, face down, just as he had crawled into my hut and fallen. The yellowish fingers of one hand clawed on my boot, and that was the only sign that he was alive. He lay quite still, except for the slow working of his fingers; and I sat still, also, staring down at him with the infinite leisure that follows a temperature of one hundred and five. It was only by slow degrees that I realized that this was Derek Scott come back, and that he was probably dying.

"I got to my feet and bent over him, but I wasn't strong enough to raise him, of course. I was afraid he'd die before any one came. So I took my revolver and aimed as well as I could at that tin roof beneath which my man Pedro was eating his dinner. The barrel went up and down with the walls of the hut, but I must have hit the roof, for the next thing there was a lot of smoke and noise, and Pedro's face, eyes, and mouth open, rushing out of it. There seemed no interval before I found myself sitting in the hammock and saying over and over again, 'But where's the little chap? Where's the little French chap?'

"Scott was still on the floor, but his head was on my man's shoulder, and Pedro was gently feeding him with sips of brandy and condensed milk. He turned and looked at me, and his eyes were clear and considering as ever, though his answer didn't sound quite sane. He said, 'The clocks wouldn't tick.'

"He said it as if it explained everything. Then he unstrapped a tin case from his belt, laid his head on it, and was instantly asleep.

"I cried out, 'Is it the fever, Pedro?' But my man said: 'No, Señor, it is the hunger.' He rolled Scott up very cleverly in a blanket. 'This señor has had the fever, but it is not upon him now. Without doubt he is a little mad from being in the forest so long. But when he wakes he will be stronger.' So much I heard, and no more. Unconsciousness came down on me like a wave. But into the dark heart of that wave I carried the certainty that Pedro knew all about the matter and that he hated Henkel. How or why I was certain of this I don't know. But I was.

"I woke in the cool of the evening. The fresh wind off the river was like the breath of life, and Pedro's face, thrust close to mine, no longer grew large and small by fits. I noticed that it was quite gray, and that his lips twitched as he muttered, 'Señor, Señor—'

"I said: 'Where is the Señor Scott?'

" 'He woke a little while ago, and called for water to wash in, and a clean coat, and he used the hair-brush. Then he took the little tin box and went out—went out.'

"I got to my feet, threw an arm over Pedro's shoulder, and he ran with me out into the moonlit street. The track to the fountain lay like a ribbon of silver, and the houses were like silver blocks. And every house was shuttered and silent—breathless. Not a man lounged under the shade of the walls, not a girl went late to draw water, not a dog barked. The little place was deserted in the hold of the forest. It lay like a lonely, luminous raft in the midst of a black sea. Only ahead of me a man stumbled slowly in the center of the road, and his shadow staggered beside him. I have said there was no other living thing visible. Yet, as this man stumbled past the shuttered houses the very blades of grass, the very leaves on the wall, seemed to have conscious life and to be aware of him. When the wind moved the trees, every branch seemed to be straining to follow him as Pedro and I followed.

"We followed, but we could not gain on him. It was like the dreams of delirium. Pedro and I seemed to be struggling through the silence of Herares as if it were something heavy and resistant, and Scott reeled from side to side, but always kept the same distance ahead. We were still behind when we turned into Henkel's garden, and the scent of the flowers beat in our faces like heat. At the veranda steps we met the servant who had admitted Scott.

"The man was running away. He was a cripple, and he came down the steps doubled up, bundled past us, and was gone. Somewhere a door clashed open. There was no other sound. But in a moment the garden seemed full of stampeding servants, all maimed, or ill, or aged. They melted silently into the bushes as rats melt into brushwood, and they took no notice of us. I heard Pedro catch his breath quickly. But when a light flared up in one of the rooms it showed no more than Scott talking with Henkel.

"They showed like moving pictures in a frame, and the frame was of dark leaves about the window, which was open. I leaned against the side of it, and Pedro squatted at my feet, his head thrust forward as if he were at a cockfight. I did not know just why I was there. Henkel sat at a table, wagging his head backward and forward; Scott was sitting opposite him. And he looked as Lazarus might have looked when first he heard the Voice and stirred.

"Henkel was saying, 'Dear me, dear me, but why should this have happened?' And Scott answered as he had answered me, in that strange, patient voice:

" 'The clocks wouldn't tick.'

" 'But they were good clocks,' cried Henkel.

"Scott shook his head. 'No, they were not good clocks,' he explained, gently; 'they were too cheap. They would not go at all in the jungle. An Indian of the Mazzaron does not care what time his clock tells, but he likes it to tick. These were no good. And the food was not good. The things in tins were bad when we opened them.'

" 'Mismanagement, mismanagement,' said Henkel, but Scott went on as if he had not heard:

" 'We followed the river for two days, and then turned east. In a week after that two of your men were dead. They died of fever. No, the quinine was no good; there was a lot of flour in it. Two days more, and another man died, but he would have died anyhow. It was very hard to see them die and be able to do nothing.

" 'The men who were left went so slowly that nearly all our food was gone when we reached the country of the Indios. We made our camp and I shot a pig. That gave us strength, but Louis was very bad then with the fever.

" 'The Indios came down, and we spoke with their head men. They thought we were mad, but the clocks pleased them; and they sat round our tents and shook them to make them tick louder until Louis cried out in his fever that all the world was a great clock that ticked. They gave us leave to hunt in their country for butterflies, and the head men told off six to help us. One was very clever. He used to wear his net on his head, with the stick hanging down behind, and he snared the butterflies with a loop of grass as if they were birds.

" 'Our tents were of cheap cotton stuff that would not keep the rain out, and the wet came in on Louis and made him worse. But he was young, and I saw to it that he had food, and your men loved him. I do not think he would have died if the clocks had ticked properly.'

" 'I do not understand,' said Henkel, blinking his heavy brown eyes.

" 'No? They were so cheap that they broke at the first winding. The Indios brought them back and asked for better ones. I had no better ones.'

" 'Still I do not understand,' said Henkel, smoothly, and blinked in the lamplight.

"Scott's tired voice went on. 'The Indios were very angry. They brought us no more butterflies, and no more food. And presently, as we went about the camp, or the paths of the forest, the little arrows began to fall in front of us and behind us, though we never saw those who shot at us.'

" 'The little arrows?' asked Henkel, heavily. 'I do not understand. Go on.'

" 'There is very little to tell. Only a nightmare of hunger, of wet, of fever, of silence, and the little poisoned arrows quivering everywhere. And one day a little dart flickered through a rent in the cotton tenting and struck Louis. He died in five minutes. Then I and the men who were left broke through and came down the Mazzaron. The Indios followed us, and I am the only one left. It is a pity the clocks wouldn't tick, Mister Henkel.'

"'Ya, ya,' said Henkel, leaning over the table, 'but the butterfly? The golden butterfly? You have found it?'

"Scott opened the tin case slowly and clumsily, drew out the perfect insect, and laid it on the table. But it is wrong to speak of that wide-winged loveliness of glittering and transparent gold as an 'insect.' Henkel sat staring at it, one big yellowish hand curved on either side of it, too happy to speak. His lips moved, and I fancied he was saying to himself, 'Cheap, cheap.'

"'It is very good,' he said at last, cunningly, 'but I am sorry there is only one. I do not know that it is worth very much. But now I will pay you as I promised. There was no agreement that you should receive the other young man's share, and there is only one insect. But I will pay you.'

"Scott was fumbling in his belt. 'Yes,' he said, 'you will pay me,' and he leaned forward with something in his hand. We saw Henkel's face turn to yellow wax, and he tried to stand up, but he was too stout to lift himself quickly. He had no time to turn before Scott shot him through the heart.

"When I broke through the vines, Scott was moving the butterfly out of the way. He looked up at me with his old, considering look, his old clean smile. 'It was cheap at the price,' he said, touching one golden wing with his finger."

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